

PRESENT

Brad Briggs, Brian Browning, Jessica Cantu, Tom Cervone, Jon Chandler, Joe Christian, Darrell Easley, DeAnna Flinchum, Kevin Frye, John Goddard, Kim Hardaway, Candy Hawkins Elisha Hodge, James Hodge, Janet Jones, Jason Jones (IPS Leadership Academy Observer), Johnny Jones, Beth Kurtz, Lisa Yamagata-Lynch (Guest Speaker), John Rich, Michael Smith-Porter, Ken Wagner, Norma Wilcox

ABSENT

Eric Amos, Jeannine Berge, Emma Burgin, Mary Lucal, Amber Mathes, Heath Nokes, Julie Roe, Theresa Sears, Kevin Thompson, Kaley Walker

1. WELCOME

Elisha Hodge, Chair and IPS MTAS Representative, welcomed everyone to the May meeting.

2. UPDATES

- a. Human Resources Update – Dr. Darrell Easley, Director of Learning & Organizational Development & Employee Relations

Dr. Easley greeted the group and began his update by welcoming Jon Chandler, Senior Employee Relations Specialist, to the meeting. Mr. Chandler recently joined the Employee Relations team. Dr. Easley noted that there are currently several open HR positions including an Executive Recruiter and Learning & Organizational Development Consultant positions. He asked the group to share the opportunities with their networks and those they feel might be interested.

Dr. Easley next announced an [upcoming insurance premium holiday](#), which will take place during the month of June.

Dr. Easley then shared that HR has been busy with return to work questions from departments and employees. Most Knoxville-area employees will return to their workplaces on June 1.

Dr. Easley closed by discussing the ongoing Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) project. There will be a number of focus groups that may include representatives or staff from represented areas with three ERP project coordinators leading the effort. Tammy Lemon, ERP Project Manager, is coordinating the focus groups.

3. COMMISSION REPORTS

a. Commission for Blacks – Elisha Hodge

Elisha Hodge reported that the [Commission](#) met on April 28 and discussed continued support around the Austin-East High School community. She noted that one of the ways the Commission supported Austin-East was an email that went out about the soccer game held on campus. She said they are looking at continued support and how to increase that support. Dr. Yamagata-Lynch noted that there is an effort to support the A-E soccer team's travel to the district tournament. The team [won the state soccer championship](#) on May 28.

Ms. Hodge reported committee updates summarized the work that has been done this academic year. The focus is the call campaign, in which every Black student who has been admitted to UT will receive a phone call from a Commission member welcoming them to whichever campus they will be attending.

b. Commission for LGBT People – Tom Cervone

Mr. Cervone reported that the [Commission](#) met on May 3. He said that the committees reported out work that they had done through the academic year so that it could be compiled and sent to the Chair, Dr. Mitsu Misawa. He noted that Dr. Misawa has agreed to serve as Chair next year, and is hopeful to have a Co-Chair. Dr. Misawa has been involved in creating a faculty mentoring task force and a LGBTQ+ reading group for faculty and graduate students, and was asked by the Vice Provost's Office to participate in discussion about improving inclusivity and hiring practices for the University. The group is working on updating the Faculty Handbook to include gender inclusive language, and hopes that updated materials will be available by the fall semester.

Mr. Cervone reported that subcommittees also met. He noted that the Communications & Alumni subgroup is working diligently to connect with members of the community who are currently on campus or have graduated to expand their network. He noted that the largest conversation was around the Transgender and

Non-binary Issues subcommittee, as that group is submitting the [Living Learning Community](#) proposal for LGBTQ+ intersectionality and social justice issues. They will incorporate an educational component as well as the new living community where there will be a designated peer mentor living on the hall to be a supportive role in everyday life and during critical needs. It will increase peer to peer mentorship in the residence halls. All peer mentors will be asked to go through Safe Zone training, and will serve as an important figure for incoming first year students. There is also interest in having peer mentors serve on the Commission.

Mr. Cervone reported that the [Pride Center](#) is open in the Student Union. He announced that “Vol Means All” t-shirts are available in the Center for those who would like to stop in to pick one up.

Mr. Cervone closed by noting the Commission next meets in September.

c. Commission for Diversity and Inclusion – Tom Cervone

Mr. Cervone reported that the [Commission](#)'s Chair, Dr. Erin Darby, sought an additional Chair or Co-Chair, and Julie Roe has volunteered to serve as Co-Chair for the Council. He said constituency reports from Janelle Coleman, Executive Director for Diversity & Engagement, will soon be online. Since the ESC meeting Renee Thomas also volunteered. She and Ms. Roe will serve as Chair and Chair-Elect for CDI.

The Diversity Summit that was postponed has been reimagined as [Zoom meetings](#). The first session will take place on June 24 at 12:00 p.m ET. and is entitled “Walking the Walk: DDI in Staff Performance Reviews”. The next session, “Empathy is a Choice,” will take place on July 6 at 12:00 p.m ET and the final session, “Call to Action: Strategies for Enhancing Anti-Racist Work,” will take place on July 22 at 12:00 p.m. ET.

Mr. Cervone closed by noting the Commission next meets in September.

d. Commission for Disability – Emma Burgin

Ms. Hodge reported on behalf of Ms. Burgin that the [Commission](#) is accepting applications for new members.

e. Commission for Women – Amber Mathes

No report was given for the [Commission](#).

f. Faculty Senate – John Goddard

Mr. Goddard reported that the [Faculty Senate](#) President's stipend was recently increased to \$10,000.00. The President is now also released from teaching courses and will gain operating expenses, which represents an increase of \$50,000 for their budget.

Mr. Goddard reported that Chancellor Plowman asked everyone to be vaccinated as soon as possible. She noted that there are eight positive cases on campus at that time and about 200 people per day are being vaccinated on campus. The Chancellor discussed salary increases related to the Governor's budget and announced that Dr. Tim Cross, Senior Vice Chancellor and Senior Vice President for UTIA, will be retiring. A search committee will be formed in the fall.

Mr. Goddard reported that Provost Zomchick announced that 91% of classes for the fall will be scheduled in person. He discussed CDC guidance for indoor classes and that they will follow that guidance. The Provost said fall enrollment looks promising with an increase in the number of freshmen. Students will have a fully residential experience for the fall.

4. GUEST SPEAKER

a. [Office of Ombuds Services](#) – Lisa Yamagata-Lynch

Dr. Lisa Yamagata-Lynch, Ombudsperson, greeted the group and began her presentation with an [introductory video](#) about organizational ombudsmen. She discussed the [International Ombudsman Association's \(IOA\)](#) code of ethics, which includes four main ideas: independence, impartiality, confidentiality, and informality. She explained that independence means the Office of Ombuds Services is not part of another unit. The Chancellor's Office provides operational support including office space but the Ombudsperson does not report to a supervisor. She noted that that allows for impartiality, a sacred boundary where her Office advocates for a fair process rather than the University or any person. Confidentiality means what is shared with her stays with her in the office. She explained that confidentiality can be broken in certain situations, the first being when there is imminent risk of physical harm to a visitor, another person, or University property. The second situation is when a visitor gives permission for confidentiality to be broken, which occurs most often when people want more information. She said although she is not a Title IX mandatory reporter, she can assist mandatory reporters through the reporting process. She also helps potential complainants for the Title IX Office talk through resources and what the reporting process is like. Lastly, informality means the Office

of Ombuds Services is not designated as a place by the University for filing a formal complaint. No records of complaints or concerns brought by visitors are recorded.

Dr. Yamagata-Lynch next reviewed her [data from the previous fiscal year](#), which included a total of 257 visitors. She noted that during the current fiscal year they have had 366 visitors, and anticipates the final count will be close to 400 visitors by the end of June. She announced that there is a current external search for a new Associate Ombuds position, and encouraged the group if they have questions to contact Jessica Cantu as she is on the search committee.

Dr. Yamagata-Lynch reviewed visitor demographics, noting that last year the majority of visitors were faculty at 42.4%. She said many of them came on behalf of their graduate students or were seeking assistance to better help them. Graduate students tend to visit when their supervisors or department heads suggest that they should visit the Ombudsperson, and tend to feel more vulnerable and are concerned about how confidential Ombuds services are. She said that when working with graduate students, staff, and faculty she has a built-in relationship with partner UTK offices like HR, the Office of the Provost, and the Graduate School who she works with.

Dr. Yamagata-Lynch next discussed [what an organizational Ombudsperson does at UT](#). First, she provides a safe space for visitors to share stories and questions and help them make empowered decisions. Second, they provide feedback to organizational leaders regarding systemic trends and issues. These trends and issues are thematic related to Colleges or units and are not focused on individuals. She discussed how visitors use Ombuds services, including engaging in problem solving or situational analysis. That can include talking through concerns or problems and working them out once they can hear their own voice. They can also seek help in framing problems or making decisions, which can involve role playing scenarios in a safe space. They can also seek help with setting career or academic goals.

Dr. Yamagata-Lynch noted that most visitors came to look for a safe space, information, or dispute resolution. Her partnerships with HR and the Office of the Provost help navigate questions about policies or practices. She also noted that visitors may seek help with supporting others like peers, colleagues, or employees who are experiencing difficult situations. She said she facilitates professional development and executive leadership coaching. [Available programs](#) include two ninety-minute workshops on addressing academic workplace conflict and design thinking for university leaders, faculty, staff, and graduate students.

Dr. Yamagata-Lynch closed by sharing contact information for the Ombuds office. She noted the website includes more information including an [informational video](#)

and other resources. She noted that email is not confidential, and a discussion about email confidentiality took place. Kevin Frye shared information on [how to encrypt emails](#) for those concerned about email confidentiality.

The Office of Ombuds services is in Dunford Hall on the UTK campus. To reach the Ombudsperson or schedule a visit, call 865-974-6273 or email: lisayl@utk.edu.

5. CONSTITUENT QUESTIONS

a. Minimum Wage Increase & Aramark Employees

Q: “I was very excited to hear that UT has raised the minimum wage to \$13 per hour for all regular full-time and part-time UT Knoxville employees.

What the minimum wage is for Aramark employees? Aramark is a private company of course, but UT chose to move dining operations to that private company, and Aramark employees are very much part of the UT community. If Aramark is not taking care of our friends and neighbors, perhaps management of dining should return to UT.”

A: Before the meeting Ms. Cantu reached out to Brian Browning, Acting Associate Vice Chancellor. He replied, “I’ve had discussions with Aramark on this very topic even prior to UT’s official announcement for UT employees. They are reviewing hourly wages for Aramark employees to determine how they will address this important need. I’m certainly willing to share more information once a decision has been made.” A discussion about Aramark and campus dining took place.

b. Bathroom Signage Legislation

Q: “Will recent legislation regarding bathroom signage affect the status of all-gender facilities on campus? I genuinely hope not, as transgender/nonbinary people could face harassment and unfair sanctions simply for using facilities appropriate for their gender. Whether or not others feel these people are using the “wrong” facilities, I want my workplace to be a safe environment for everyone and changing policies regarding existing all-gender bathrooms would be a detriment toward that. Thank you in advance for addressing this subject with the Council.”

A: Before the meeting Ms. Cantu reached out to Terry Ledford, Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for Facilities Services. He responded, “Thank you for inquiring about

the recently passed law regarding bathroom signage. The University, based on its review of the law, believes its current signage is in compliance with the new law.”

Ms. Hodge noted that she has had many questions about the legislation from MTAS customers.

c. Parking Plans for Return to Campus & Summer

Q: “With all the construction and bringing people back to work by June 1, what is the plan for parking? Summer into Fall (especially on the AG campus)?”

A: Before the meeting Ms. Cantu reached out to Mr. Browning. He replied, “There should be very minimal construction impact on parking as employees return to campus in preparation for Fall semester. The new Zeanah Engineering building and West Side Dining will both open at the start of Fall semester. The OIT project in the commuter lot on the Ag campus will be finished over the summer. There will be some lane closures along Joe Johnson and a few spaces impacted around the Vet Med addition and the new Ellington building replacement. However, we will have nearly 300 spaces available at University Commons near the former Walmart.”

For more information about campus construction, visit: <https://conezone.utk.edu/>

d. Exempt Staff & Well-being

Q: “I’m on call 24/7/365 and don’t have a backup. This is a set up for burnout (which I’m experiencing now). What are other groups doing? Just because you’re exempt doesn’t mean you should be on call all of the time. You can never truly mentally shut down from your job. I have contacted HR by the way, but I’m all about advocating for others that may be experiencing the same thing because your mental health and well-being is extremely important.”

A: Dr. Easley empathized with the constituent, noting the seriousness of feeling burnt out that many employees have experienced that over the past year. He applauded the constituent for reaching out to HR to talk about their resources, and announced a related upcoming Zoom panel discussion entitled “[Remember Your Resources](#)” on June 9. He said that though many of us are familiar with support resources we may not need those services at that time. The panel discussion is intended to refresh attendees’ awareness of resources like the [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#).

Janet Jones explained that the constituent works in a clinical care setting for animals where supervisors must be available to call when problems occur. She and Dr. Easley

discussed exempt staff eligibility for flexible scheduling, and Dr. Easley noted that he would check with Compensation and respond to Ms. Hodge for sharing with the group.

Dr. Easley asked the group about how they are managing scheduling-related burnout. Mr. Cervone responded that his business requires after hours, weekends, and nights. He supervises exempt staff and they have an understanding that, if they are working all weekend or extra in producing shows, they should take care of themselves scheduling-wise. Mr. Goddard said that because Extension Offices are in each county statewide, expectations can differ from one county to the next. Mr. Cervone responded that exempt employees can be empowered by talking with the Ombudsperson or with HR. Dr. Yamagata-Lynch replied that when people come to her she starts by understanding their situations, looking at policies and possibly asking HR for clarification around those policies. The employee has to decide whether to talk with their supervisor or not. Kim Hardaway noted that some supervisors may be fearful their employees will take advantage of flexibility and adjusted schedules. She said she would encourage constituents to talk with their supervisor or department head about how they can set boundaries when calls can be directed elsewhere, especially if they have to respond to an intense or complex situation that takes a lot of time. Ms. Jones noted that the College of Veterinary Medicine has pushed for work-life balance but those who have less control of their schedules feel resentful because of having to work extended hours or having a lack of work flexibility.

e. Mileage Reimbursement – Follow-up

Mr. Goddard gave a presentation on information prepared by UTIA comparing UT mileage reimbursement with regional universities. The information presented and the original constituent question will be taken to the Employee Relations Advisory Board (ERAB).

6. OTHER BUSINESS

a. Elections Update – DeAnna Flinchum

DeAnna Flinchum gave an update about Exempt Staff Council elections. Eight groups were up for election this year, and she noted we had almost 400 votes cast out of 1,100 possibilities meaning 36% participation. There will be five new representatives and two incumbents. A tiebreaker election for the Business group is currently taking place and will finish later this week.

Ms. Hodge congratulated Mr. Goddard and Beth Kurtz, who won re-election for their areas.

b. Non-Voting Member Addition Request: Ombudsperson

Ms. Hodge announced that Dr. Yamagata-Lynch has requested that the Ombudsperson be allowed to take part in meetings as a non-voting member. She asked the group to discuss the request given confidentiality issues and the sensitive nature of some constituent questions and discussions. Ken Wagner responded that he was not opposed to the request, and Ms. Kurtz agreed and said she would be welcomed. Ms. Hardaway noted the effort to leave representatives' names off constituent questions to help with confidentiality and anonymity for constituents. She suggested that the Ombudsperson position could be added to the by-laws as an ad hoc member. Ms. Hodge offered to review the by-laws and look at proposed language to discuss at the next meeting.

A discussion about by-laws amendments and allowing constituents to view meetings took place. Ms. Hodge asked representatives contact her to share their views, and the Council can discuss the question at the next meeting.

7. REMINDERS

- a. Please email constituent questions to Elisha Hodge (elisha.hodge@tennessee.edu) or Jessica Cantu (jlcantu@utk.edu).