
PRESENT

Emma Burgin, Jessica Cantu, Jon Chandler, George Drinnon, Darrell Easley, John Goddard, Liz Gossett (IPS Leadership Academy), Elisha Hodge, Rita Jackson, Bonnie Johnson, Janet Jones, Johnny Jones, Beth Kurtz, Victoria Leidy, Mary Lucal, Amber Mathes, Heath Nokes, Donde Plowman, Blake Reagan, Theresa Sears, Kenneth Wagner, Matt Ward, Brooke Wichmann, Norma Wilcox, Lisa Yamagata-Lynch

ABSENT

Eric Amos, Tom Cervone, Kevin Frye, Marcus Hilliard, James Hodge, Julie Roe, Michael Smith-Porter, Kevin Thompson, Kaley Walker

1. WELCOME

Elisha Hodge, Past Chair and IPS MTAS representative, welcomed everyone to the November meeting.

2. GUEST SPEAKER

Chancellor Donde Plowman greeted the group and reflected on the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday. She shared her appreciation for the work of exempt staff during the pandemic.

Chancellor Plowman began by discussing the new [Strategic Vision](#) goals that the Board of Trustees recently approved, noting it will take all of us to change the way we think about what it means to be a university. She cited the Strategic Vision as a means to counter waning public confidence in higher education institutions and said it will open new opportunities to learners across the state.

The [Strategic Vision goals](#) are cultivating the Volunteer experience, conducting research that makes life and lives better, ensuring a culture where Vol is a Verb, making ourselves nimble and adaptable, and embodying the modern R1 land-grant university.

Chancellor Plowman touched on the role of staff in reaching each of the Strategic Vision goals. She said the first goal is intended to help everyone, including staff, feel like they are Volunteers. The research goal will help create a more just, prosperous, and sustainable world. The goal of innovation and agility will require the help of staff as we create a culture shift in how we meet requests and needs. She asked for the group to actively identifying and reviewing rules and procedures that are not a fit for making ourselves nimble and adaptable. She noted diversity and inclusion including Vol as a Verb as important in making the campus a welcoming environment for everyone. She affirmed each department and person on campus has a place to become involved in the Vision.

Chancellor Plowman next addressed the [masking mandate](#) and shared her personal experience in gauging masking requirements understanding in teaching first-year students. She discussed how the campus has been impacted by litigation, state legislation barring mandates, and the federal contractor mandate. She said that understanding changes to the mandate status can be difficult and confirmed that decision-making about masks is no longer made at the campus level. She shared her hope that conditions will continue to improve.

Chancellor Plowman then asked the group for their feedback around what can be done to improve campus communication and moving to a more agile mindset. George Drinnon responded he would like to see those who are in key decision-making positions empowered to avoid hiding behind policy in making decisions that do not align with the way things have been done. Chancellor Plowman agreed and considered at what management level to start with. She agreed that there is an issue in helping leaders let go of procedures that create bottlenecks. Lisa Yamagata-Lynch shared the effort of the [Office of Ombuds Services](#) in helping visitors who receive a firm “no” reframe and consider policy or processes that can help them feel empowered and get to “yes.” Dr. Yamagata-Lynch explained that the Ombuds can serve as a sounding board or neutral perspective and encouraged the group to visit. Chancellor Plowman praised the work of Dr. Yamagata-Lynch and encouraged the group to make use of the Office of Ombuds Services.

The Chancellor shared her frustration with bureaucracy, lack of automation, and siloed departmental information systems causing slowdowns. She said customer relationship management (CRM) solutions like a new student information system will better track students from initial interest to becoming alumni. John Goddard said he appreciated Chancellor Plowman’s interest in feedback and shared his thoughts on virtual service award celebrations and that in-person events allowed for conversations with her and President Boyd. A discussion about service award celebrations took place, with the Chancellor noting commencement was held for

multiple classes and service award celebrations should be considered a similar in-person opportunity.

3. CONSTITUENT QUESTIONS FOR CHANCELLOR PLOWMAN

a. Voluntary Retirement Incentive Program for Staff

Q: “The Provost announced today the UT Board will consider a voluntary retirement incentive program (VRIP) for UTK faculty. Is the University considering offering a similar plan for staff?”

A: Chancellor Plowman responded that a similar plan for staff was not currently under consideration, but that it did not mean it would not be considered in the future. She discussed faculty tenure and issues related to VRIP.

Janet Jones discussed difficulty in replacing clinical faculty in the Veterinary Hospital. She noted that VRIP may make filling open faculty positions within the Hospital more difficult since the state of veterinary medicine is in private, corporate practice. Chancellor Plowman responded that Provost Zomchick has talked with Senior Vice President/Senior Vice Chancellor Linda Martin and College of Veterinary Medicine Dean Jim Thompson about VRIP. She said staging flexibility was built into the program if it were to impact departments particularly hard. Dr. Lucal affirmed that VRIP allowed faculty to be able to return in adjunct status if they wanted to and the department needed them to continue to teach for a period.

John Goddard expressed his frustration that Extension agents did not qualify for VRIP inclusion. Chancellor Plowman empathized with Mr. Goddard and shared her appreciation for Extension agents’ work. She noted that although agents were not included in the current VRIP round it did not mean eligibility could not be revisited in the future. Heath Nokes agreed with Mr. Goddard’s statements, and Chancellor Plowman reassured Mr. Nokes that she thinks of Extension as an arm of the University’s education and teaching mission.

b. Limited Initial Mask Requirement

Q: “Why was the limited mask requirement of the initial UTK Updated COVID Guidelines targeted only to academic spaces/events (i.e., classrooms & labs) without regard to all indoor areas including staff workplaces, particularly given the equal vaccine access for students as faculty & staff? It appeared to imply that the University believed there was sufficient cause for concern but was prioritizing student over employee health.”

A: Chancellor Plowman responded that the question was directed at the first two weeks of school where a [mask mandate was put in place for classrooms only](#). She explained that was before conditions worsened due to the Delta variant. She emphasized the limited mask requirement was not intended to exclude staff but was to address the most congested spaces like classrooms where social distancing is difficult. She noted that current low case numbers show that what has been done has been quite effective, citing a lack of virus presence in recent [wastewater testing](#) of residence halls and Greek housing by Dr. Frank Loeffler.

Chancellor Plowman reminded the group that the biggest difference from this time last year is vaccine availability, noting that even prior to the current mandate 78% of faculty, 73% of staff and at a minimum 68% of students have reported receiving vaccination. Dr. Lucal confirmed vaccines are readily available at the [Student Health Center](#), and supervisors should provide time for employees to visit the Center for vaccination. Chancellor Plowman and Dr. Lucal shared they both have received their boosters. Janet Jones asked how employees who do not get vaccinated and do not have a religious or medical exemption would be handled. Chancellor Plowman responded that they are projecting a small core of employees will be in that group and they want to be accommodating and flexible. Dr. Lucal cited situational fluidity around the federal mandate. She said the current emphasis is on supporting people through uploading vaccine or exemption documentation and that as we are a federal contractor, we are trying to follow those rules.

c. Strategic Vision and Staff

Q: “What new opportunities will the 2021 strategic vision offer staff?”

A: Chancellor Plowman responded there will be a number of new opportunities around the five Strategic Vision goals. She said the most obvious are around agility in finding and creating more collaborative office spaces and considering older processes. She said staff could help by reminding each other to speak up and figure out how to simplify procedures.

The Chancellor said there will be diversity and inclusion related opportunities for those on search committees in diversifying our faculty and staff. She cited an example of narrowly written job descriptions as barriers to creating diverse candidate pools. She said the commitment to the land grant mission will take considering the University’s outreach to the state and how the Extension platform can elevate and enrich Tennesseans’ lives.

d. Private Offices Definition

Q: “What is the definition of the “private offices” exception to the current indoor UT mask mandate? For example, must those offices have floor-to-ceiling walls and doors that can close, or do adjacent cubicles with 4-5-foot-high dividers and situated off common hallways qualify?”

A: Chancellor Plowman replied she recently talked with a health care expert about classroom concerns. The expert recommended she tell those with concerns to take responsibility and wear their mask to protect themselves. The Chancellor took issue with a need for strict rules and definitions defining behavior and encouraged everyone to use common sense, be respectful, and take care of each other. Dr. Lucal agreed, and Chancellor Plowman noted that even if offices differ in how they decide to consider spaces if everyone is comfortable with how to handle them, she is fine with their decision.

4. UPDATES

- a. Human Resources Update – Dr. Mary Lucal, Associate Vice Chancellor, Human Resources

Dr. Lucal expressed her appreciation for the Chancellor’s visit and efforts in ushering a different way of thinking, especially in a business governed by rules and policies. She noted that Dr. Darrell Easley would share information about [performance review workshops](#) that Employee Relations has put together. HR and the Office of Equity and Diversity will present workshops highlighting the new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) category, and other workshops will focus on supervisors and staff reviews.

Dr. Lucal then discussed the vaccine mandate. She said many people have uploaded vaccine information and requests for exemptions, and HR is currently fielding questions about the process. She said most people are managing well in using the IRIS Web Employee Self Service (ESS) portal. She discussed covered buildings and asked the group to direct constituents with questions to their supervisor.

Dr. Lucal next touched on unemployment fraud and holiday shopping fraud awareness. She encouraged everyone to be vigilant about credit card use and giving out identity information. She also encouraged the group to [review their beneficiary information](#) with the coming of the new year. She related the importance of remembering that life changes such as marriage or divorce may mean beneficiary information should also change.

Dr. Lucal next announced the Staff Diversity Fellow opportunity, noting the November 29 application deadline. Those interested should contact Dr. Easley for more information.

Ken Wagner asked about phishing emails that look to have come from HR, including an email from “HR Batch” that also looked like a scam. Dr. Lucal confirmed the HR Batch email came from UT System HR, and she would mention his concern at an upcoming HR meeting and ask if anything can be done to make emails more identifiable as legitimate. She noted talking with Joel Reeves, Associate Vice Chancellor & Chief Information Officer for the Office of Information Technology (OIT), about [recent phishing testing](#) and shared his feedback that we as a campus community are doing well. Ms. Hodge shared her appreciation for HR Employee Relations’ work in addressing [unemployment fraud](#). Mr. Goddard related an odd phone call that he recently received that may have been a phishing attempt. Dr. Lucal responded she would ask about phone call security.

5. COMMISSION REPORTS

a. Commission for Blacks – Elisha Hodge

Elisha Hodge reported the [Commission](#) hosted an event called “A Seat at the Table” on October 28. She noted the event was well attended and had great information about professional development and moving up in the UT System for Commission members.

b. Commission for LGBT People – Tom Cervone

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

c. Council for Diversity and Inclusion – Tom Cervone

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

d. Commission for Disability – Emma Burgin

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

e. Commission for Women – Amber Mathes

Amber Mathes reported on committee updates for the [Commission](#). She reported the Accessing Climate workshop series will launch in 2022 and the Events Committee is finalizing plans for an event to take place in the spring in the Student Union ballroom. Dates and more information about both the series and event will be shared with the group once available. The Family Committee is looking into childcare options and available funding opportunities, and the Equity Issues Committee continues to gather

data for their annual salary equity study. More information about both will be shared once available.

f. Faculty Senate – George Drinnon

George Drinnon reported the [Faculty Senate](#) met on November 15 and will next meet in February 2022. He reported the Faculty Senate read minutes from the Undergraduate Council into the record and discussed the [academic calendar](#), which is impacted by the new winter mini term. He said there was discussion about how the term will impact student academic operations and potential compensation for graduate students and faculty. The new compressed academic calendar may affect the ability for faculty and staff to take time off.

Mr. Drinnon continued by reporting Provost Zomchick was present for the meeting. He said the Provost talked about new structural changes and that four general proposals had been presented. The proposals, which are [posted on the Office of the Provost's website](#), encapsulate different models for how campus structure could be modified. The Provost also pointed out that the next stage of discussion would be a campus engagement process to bring in all stakeholders to discuss the different proposals.

Mr. Drinnon next reported that there were discussions about vaccine mandates. He said several faculty made comments and expressed concern about student mental well-being in light of the current health, social, and political situation. The senate also discussed their meeting modality going forward. The next meeting will take place via Zoom, and they will then decide whether to continue over Zoom or return to in person meetings. He reported there was interest in continuing to meet via Zoom.

Mr. Drinnon closed his report by noting discussion of sick leave proposals for nine-month faculty versus twelve-month.

6. CONSTITUENT QUESTIONS

a. Voluntary Retirement Incentive Program for Staff

Q: “I, at one time, participated in a program, TNCEP (Tennessee Nutrition Consumer Education Program) but have not for several years now. However, I regularly get annual reports for this program to share with stakeholders in my county. This makes no sense to me since that program is not offered here, is quite costly to print and distribute and is quite frankly a huge waste of funding if they are sending this report to multiple counties that do not offer the program. I think of what benefits these

dollars can be, programmatically. This year I received 50 copies of an 8 page, multi color slick printed booklet. In years past there were reports that played videos, etc. I wish our institution were better stewards of our funds.?”

A: Dr. Lucal responded she thought the best thing for the constituent to do would be contact the office that publishes the report and opt out of receiving the publication.

Rita Jackson explained that TNCEP is an Extension education program offered across the state in over ninety counties. The program works with low-income families and the report gives an overview of how funds are used in participating counties as well as economic benefit to the counties. She noted most counties must report to county administrators on what Extension is doing and how programs are working. The report is intended to help the counties show how the TNCEP program is benefiting their county. She said if a county is not participating in TNCEP or providing information to their county then they do not have a requirement to print the report.

Dr. Lucal asked to clarify that the report was sent electronically, and Ms. Jackson responded it was and the county can print the annual report booklet for distribution to stakeholders and county administrators. The state provides the report for the benefit of participating counties, so if the constituent’s county does not want to receive or distribute the report it is not required as TNCEP is a grant funded program. She said all printing costs are paid through the grant, not county funds. Ms. Jackson offered that the constituent could contact her via email if they would like to opt out of receiving the report.

b. Voluntary Retirement Incentive Program for Staff

Q: “Why is it now taking 3 to 4 weeks for travel reimbursement?”

A: Dr. Lucal said she reached out to Mark Paganelli, Treasurer. Mr. Paganelli responded reimbursements are at a two-week turnaround, which is about the same amount of time as pre-Covid reimbursements. The Treasurer’s Office is also adding another staff member, which should improve turnaround time.

Dr. Lucal said her understanding from Mr. Paganelli is there was a rush of reimbursement requests due to more people travelling than in the last year. The [new travel system, Concur](#), can also be challenging to use for people who have not used it before. Dr. Lucal shared her experience with the Concur learning curve and asked the group to be kind to those reimbursing travel expenses. Mr. Goddard shared his feedback about longer reimbursement wait times after UTIA moved from internal approvals to the Treasurer’s Office.

c. Market Range Advancement

Q: “Under the new job families and market ranges, does HR have any concrete steps that someone can take to move up in the quartiles within their market range? For example, if someone is in a job family with a market range of MR10 and their salary falls at or very close to the minimum quartile amount, how can they progress up the 25th quartile or the midpoint quartile without relying solely on University merit increases – a process that could take many years (about 17 years of 2% increases to get from the minimum to the midpoint)? When our department has inquired about this, we’ve been told that HR is still working on this. Since the new job families and market ranges went into effect a year ago, a number of staff in my department are wondering why the steps needed to advance within a market range wasn’t determined before the market ranges went into effect – not to mention that nearly a year later there still doesn’t appear to be an answer?”

A: Dr. Lucal responded that since the project started a year ago Compensation has completed hundreds of compensation analyses. She said if the constituent’s department believes someone is misplaced on the market range they can request and analysis through their supervisor at any time. She said she believes the constituent is asking if a published set of information is available that tells an employee how to move higher in the range. She responded that, as far as she is aware, there is no published set of rules and, if it were, it would have been published by UT System. She also noted that additional factors are considered in the process and that recommended changes are dependent on the department’s budget.

Dr. Lucal asked the representative to redirect the constituent to their department to request a compensation analysis.

d. Follow-up: Extension Performance Appraisals

Q: “Will there ever be an opportunity for agents to meet with regional staff and speak for themselves in their own performance appraisal? I have worked for UT Extension for 26 years and have never had such an opportunity.?”

A: Doug Bohner, UTIA Chief Human Resources Officer, and John Toman, Extension HR Director, responded:

“The performance appraisal process encourages ongoing feedback and communication between the immediate supervisor and employee. This communication should occur regularly throughout the year, so the employee has the opportunity to ask questions and is fully aware of expected performance. As most

organizations, Extension has a hierarchical structure with clearly defined roles. The county director has the responsibility to rate the employee and conduct the appraisal interview while the regional director advises and coordinates the final ratings with the county director. As part of the process, employees have the opportunity to review the appraisal with their county director. If an employee disagrees with the appraisal score they may comment on the appraisal form or follow the rebuttal process as outlined in the Appraisal Manual.”

7. OTHER BUSINESS

a. Staff Performance Daily Workshop Series.

Dr. Easley announced that Human Resources and the Office of Equity & Diversity (OED) are excited to share that the Staff Performance Review series is underway. As a reminder, staff performance reviews are due annually on March 31 each year. Virtual sessions will be available in December, January and February and topics will focus on employees, leadership, and Diversity, Engagement, and Inclusion in our everyday work.

Please join HR and OED in exploring diversity, engagement & inclusion (DEI) in staff performance reviews and learn how to better understand DEI in our everyday work and how it relates to the review process.

Registration is now available in K@TE at <https://kate.tennessee.edu/>

More information about all the sessions can be found on the Events Calendar: https://calendar.utk.edu/department/human_resources/calendar

Dr. Easley asked the representatives to spread the word about this learning opportunity.

Sharable flyer: https://hr.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/56/2021/11/Staff-Performance-Review-Series_Dec-Feb-Session-Info.pdf

b. Council for Diversity & Inclusion Funding Opportunity

The Council for Diversity & Inclusion (CDI) has a funding opportunity designed to provide financial support for new, innovative, and creative approaches to raise awareness, engage learners, and change attitudes and behaviors about diversity and inclusion within the university community. Funding requests of up to \$500 may be made for special programs and events intended to increase respect for diversity and individual differences.

More information & application: <https://cdi.utk.edu/funding-request/>

c. Consideration of Draft Resolution

Ms. Hodge followed up on last month's consideration of the draft resolution, noting feedback and comments. She asked for questions or concerns about the resolution, which was created to thank all the individuals who have worked hard in keeping the campus safe during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ms. Hodge called for anyone opposed to placing the resolution on the Council's website. No opposition was voiced. Ms. Hodge thanked the group for supporting the effort and shared her thoughts on the importance of showing gratitude. The resolution was [placed on the ESC website](#).

d. December meeting

Ms. Hodge asked the group to vote on whether to hold a December meeting or adjourn until January. The group voted in favor of adjourning, and the next meeting will be held on January 25. Ms. Hodge wished all in attendance a safe holiday and shared her hope all can rest and relax with friends and family.

8. REMINDERS

a. Next meeting: January 25, 2022

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