
PRESENT

Eric Amos, Jessica Cantu, Tom Cervone, Jon Chandler, George Drinnon, Darrell Easley, DeAnna Flinchum, Kevin Frye, John Goddard, Elisha Hodge, James Hodge, Bonnie Johnson, Janet Jones, Blake Reagan, Theresa Sears, Nancy Taylor, Ken Wagner, Matt Ward, Norma Wilcox, Lisa Yamagata-Lynch

ABSENT

Emma Burgin, Marcus Hilliard, Rita Jackson, Johnny Jones, Beth Kurtz, Mary Lucal, Heath Nokes, Amber Mathes, Michael Smith-Porter, Kevin Thompson, Kaley Walker, Lisa Yamagata-Lynch

1. WELCOME

Elisha Hodge, Past Chair and IPS MTAS representative, welcomed everyone to the February meeting. Tom Cervone, Current Chair, greeted the group and thanked the group and Ms. Hodge for support.

2. UPDATES

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

Darrell Easley greeted the group and began his update by reminding everyone that performance reviews are due March 31. He indicated many reviews are currently either in progress or complete.

Dr. Easley next announced that Compensation is developing a series of workshops, including calculating a starting salary. He noted the decision to shift salary setting from HR to departments and divisions allows for more autonomy. As many factors go into salary setting, he encouraged the group to consider attending the workshops if interested.

Dr. Easley then announced that Recruitment will hold an in-person job fair tomorrow, March 23, at Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) where they will be recruiting for administrative assistant and facilities services positions. They will also host an upcoming job fair at the [South Press coffeehouse](#) on Chapman Highway. He encouraged anyone who has vacancies in areas where job fair recruitment may be helpful to contact [Chelsey Byrd, Recruitment Manager](#), for more information.

John Goddard asked if civil rights reports were also due on March 31. Dr. Easley responded that he wasn't sure but could find out. Lisa Yamagata-Lynch asked when the TCAT job fair would take place. Dr. Easley confirmed that it is tomorrow, March 23.

3. COMMISSION REPORTS

a. Commission for Blacks – Elisha Hodge

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

b. Commission for LGBT People – Tom Cervone

Mr. Cervone reported that Dr. Easley was a guest speaker at the last [Commission](#) meeting. He said there was discussion around various development opportunities and options for staff, including the [UT Inclusive Leadership Academy \(UTILA\)](#) for exempt staff, [UConnecT](#) for non-exempt staff, and supervisor training on Fridays. He shared his thanks for Dr. Easley joining the meeting.

Mr. Cervone continued his report by announcing several new commissions are being formed including the Commission for Asian American & Pacific Islanders. He said the group is meeting and preparing to organize their Commission. There is also interest in how to collaborate and share information between the Commissions since he and other employees sit on several of the same Councils and Commissions.

Mr. Cervone next shared several virtual lecture events including Dr. Leia Cain's recent talk on "Spilling the (Sweet) Tea: How Southern U.S. Queer Students Thrive in Icy University Climates". Dr. Michael Denton will speak on March 25 on "[Breaking the Silence on Campus About Gay College Men and All Students Living with HIV](#)." A third speaker is forthcoming. He reported that the Alumni Subcommittee has a new database available for alumni donors who identify as LGBTQ+ and noted this is the first time a list has been compiled. He also announced that Commission membership and award applications open today.

Mr. Cervone next reported that the [Pride Center will celebrate the annual Trans Day of Visibility on March 31](#). There will be several events including free HIV testing, a trans resource fair, and a showing of the film, *Disclosure*. Painting of the Rock is scheduled for 9:00 a.m. Bonnie Johnson encouraged the group to join the Rock painting event.

Mr. Cervone closed his report by announcing [Lavender Graduation](#) will be held Wednesday, April 27.

- 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

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

- f. Faculty Senate – George Drinnon

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

4. CONSTITUENT QUESTIONS

- a. Extension Agents Classification

Follow-Up Q: “Why are Extension Agents no longer classified as Faculty as they were in the 1980s? Will they be reclassified as Faculty in the near future? If so, would they be tenured or non-tenured? What would be the difference?”

A: Before the meeting, Jessica Cantu reached out to Doug Bohner, Human Resource Officer for UTIA HR. Mr. Bohner replied:

“**Why are Extension Agents no longer classified as Faculty as they were in the 1980s?** “I cannot speak directly to the history but my understanding is that this changed when the UTIA and UTK faculty handbooks were merged. Based on SACS

standards at the time, it was determined that the role of Extension Agent did not meet the criteria to be considered faculty.”

“Will they be reclassified as Faculty in the near future?” This is being considered for re-examination but there is no specific timeline as to when a determination may be reached.

“If so, would they be tenured or non-tenured?” This is a decision that will need to be made as part of the review but it is most likely that these roles would be considered non-tenure track.

“What would be the difference?” We would abide by the existing definitions and requirements as outlined by SACS, the UT Board of Trustees policies, and the faculty handbook.”

b. Programs for Minors’ System

Follow-Up Q: “Programs for Minors’ online registration system is difficult to navigate and not user-friendly. It is also unclear how to determine which teams in my department must work with the Programs for Minors Office. One team was told they do not need to, and another was told they should.”

A: Dr. Easley responded that Ellen Pickering Hunter, Business Manager for the Programs for Minors’ Office, responded:

“I am very happy to report that, since this question was raised last month, we have made several enhancements to the Programs for Minors website (<https://programsforminors.utk.edu/>) and registration system (<https://minors.utk.edu/login.php>).”

Ms. Pickering Hunter noted that they strive for 100% satisfaction with the process and provided context around the criteria for registration. She encouraged the constituent to reach out to her at 865-705-4506 if they encounter any difficulties in the future.

c. Travel Reimbursement Delays

Q: “When Dr. Burns was Dean, he successfully reworked the process for mileage, per diem, and petty cash reimbursement. Our travels were approved AND PAID within 4-5 days. However, since the Ag campus merged with the main campus, the length of time for reimbursement has become substandard . . . requiring a month or so.

Meanwhile, while we wait and wait for reimbursement, our personal credit card payment comes due.

Can this please be addressed with the ESC?”

A: Before the meeting, Jessica Cantu reached out to Tisha Marshall, Director of Accounts Payable with the Treasurer’s Office. Ms. Marshall responded that travel reimbursement turnaround is normally around 10 business days from when the travel expense report is received. Overall travel volume has increased significantly, and they are working as quickly as possible to catch up.

Ms. Marshall said she understands the frustration with the time delay, and explained the office is hiring a new travel auditor but filling the position has been difficult.

A discussion took place about experiences with delayed travel reimbursement. Ken Wagner shared that employees can now request a UT Travel Card, which eliminates the need to be reimbursed for travel expenses. Mr. Cervone and Mr. Drinnon shared their experiences obtaining a travel card, including taking related required K@TE training.

For more information about Travel Cards and Concur, visit <https://finance.tennessee.edu/travel/>.

d. Cost of Living Raise Funding & Guidance

Q: “How do most University Departments and Institutes award cost of living raises funded by the General Assembly? If an employee receives an 18 on their APR, will that employee receive their full cost of living raise in most departments/institutes of the University? What guidance does UT HR provide to leadership concerning the distribution of cost of living raises to employees who have satisfied supervisor expectations?”

Q: “May cost of living raises funded by the General Assembly be used for market adjustments? What guidance does UT HR provide to supervisors regarding market adjustments and their funding?”

A: Dr. Easley responded within the state budget document, that there is no cost-of-living adjustment. He said the state budget document states, “A salary pool for higher education employees equivalent to a 4 percent increase effective July 1, 2022, is funded with a recurring \$694,400 for state-administered programs, \$28,396,600 for the University of Tennessee, \$23,003,800 for the Locally Governed Institutions

and \$14,186,200 for the Board of Regents. Total new funding for higher education salaries equals \$66,281,000.”

He noted that sometimes the Chancellor includes an across-the-board component, but no decision has yet been made or approved on how this 4% will be handled.

Dr. Easley then discussed guidance and said the System creates guidance with campuses and institutes creating salary guidelines. Vice Chancellors and Deans work with their teams on how they are going to handle merit and market money. He noted HR is available for consultation on this matter. Departments have the independence to administer their pool in a way they see fit as long as they are following guidelines.

Janet Jones asked if merit and market are different from cost of living as sometimes there is an across-the-board increase regardless of performance review scoring. She followed up to ask if the cost-of-living increases are dictated by guidelines or if it is up to the colleges and departments to determine that. Dr. Easley responded that while cost of living does come as an across-the-board increase it isn't known what that would mean for this year. Mr. Wagner noted that the last time there was an across-the-board raise was in 2015, and since that time the University has moved to market and merit-based decisions. Ms. Hodge asked if HR provides guidance to departments. Dr. Easley responded that they could assist with campus guidelines and leaders can make decisions that fall within those guidelines. He offered that Dr. Mary Lucal can follow up on the question if that would be helpful. Ms. Jones shared how the College of Veterinary Medicine makes decisions about allocating money and how performance reviews and equity adjustments affect how it is awarded.

e. Information about At-Risk Coworkers

Q: “How can we learn more about the baseline minimum wage and other related metrics that affect the economic hardships of our coworkers?”

Do we have at-risk coworkers and, if so, how can we help them?”

A: Dr. Easley responded that the UTK campus' minimum wage was increased to \$15.00 per hour. He explained that several factors go into considering if someone is at-risk and coworkers' financial wellbeing is a personal matter unless they choose to share that information. If anyone is concerned for a coworker's wellbeing or is concerned someone is struggling, he asked them to contact Employee Relations or refer the employee to be connected with community resources including the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

f. Performance Review Questions & Scoring

Q: “A constituent raised concerns about the DEI category on the staff performance reviews. Can you provide some clarity on categories and scoring?”

A: Dr. Easley referred the question to Jon Chandler. Mr. Chandler suggested that any supervisor, manager, or leader is welcome to contact Employee Relations to walk through concerns on a case-by-case basis, especially if an employee has specific concerns around a particular category. He explained that there is no magic formula for tasks like training hours or initiatives to improve scoring as scores are dependent on each person, their job, and their individual goals or related goals the department may have. Managers can consult with Employee Relations to talk about how to best communicate goals and expectations with their employees and how goals related to specific categories.

Kevin Frye identified the question as coming from his constituent and shared he has had several constituents ask about how to score higher than a three in the new Inclusion, Diversity & Equity (IDE) category on staff annual performance reviews. He explained scores have decreased for some constituents due to the change from the previous category to the new one. That has been frustrating due to how department merit decisions are made. He reflected on how threshold decisions impact his constituents’ concerns about inflation.

A discussion took place about a lack of general guidelines for scoring and ways to improve scoring. Dr. Easley reflected on HR’s internal discussions about what scoring for the different categories looks like for the department. He said the intention is that someone scoring a five should make significant contributions to the work the question poses. Mr. Frye shared his constituents’ frustration with the lack of transparency about how their reviews are completed. He said a lack of standard scoring guidance makes it difficult to understand how to achieve a better score and, in turn, an increased opportunity to receive merit money. Dr. Easley shared that although the understanding is that goals are individual and depend on the role and department, departmental standards can be set and applied for scoring consistency. He said he would take the constituent feedback to the HR leadership team.

Mr. Chandler noted Employee Relations is developing additional IDE sessions for the fall including looking to do a deeper dive on all review categories. Mr. Cervone shared that his department created an IDE committee that worked on their Diversity Action Plan, which is posted on their website. He empathized with Mr. Frye in navigating difficult situations with performance review scores including addressing marginalization in the theatre industry. Mr. Goddard shared his experience with a direct report’s performance appraisal.

5. OTHER BUSINESS

a. UTK HR Newsletter Debuts Today

Jon Chandler announced that the inaugural issue of the [new UTK HR Newsletter, Engage](#), will debut later today. The newsletter will feature human resources-related news and events as well as information about professional development opportunities and other helpful news from Knoxville campus partners.

He asked the group to share the newsletter with their constituents and areas and for feedback.

b. Listen. Learn. Lead. Week: Staff Events – Next Monday (3/28)

Free speech and academic freedom are among the most challenging and timely issues facing universities in our state and across the nation.

In an effort to learn more about how to navigate the difficult situations that can arise related to these topics the Howard Baker Center, Division of Diversity & Engagement, and Office of Human Resources have partnered to feature sessions for staff during Listen. Learn. Lead. Week.

Sign up today for staff events on Monday, March 28. Spots are filling up fast!

- Navigating Difficult Conversations (12:00 p.m. ET - in-person Lunch & Learn)
- The Art of Public Deliberation (3:30 p.m. ET - virtual event)

More information including sign-up links: <https://news.utk.edu/2022/03/21/listen-learn-lead-week/>.

c. UTILA: Now Accepting Applications

Are you interested in becoming a more inclusive leader on the UTK campus or know someone who would?

L&OD in partnership with the Division of Diversity and Engagement is proud to announce the 2022-2023 University of Tennessee Inclusive Leadership Academy (UTILA) is now accepting applications.

Learn more about UTILA: <https://hr.utk.edu/ut-inclusive-leadership-academy/>

d. STRIDE for Staff Workshop: Pilot Session Volunteers

Learning and Organizational Development has an exciting opportunity for commission and council members to play a role in shaping the future of the STRIDE for Staff workshop. We are seeking volunteers to attend one of two Zoom pilot sessions and provide feedback that will serve to enhance the new STRIDE workshop launching in fall 2022. Each session is capped at a maximum of 50 participants. Session information and sign-ups are included below.

If you have any questions please contact Abby Sherman, Staff Diversity Fellow at asherm10@utk.edu.

Zoom links will be provided one week prior to the sessions:

Tuesday April 12, 2022 9:00a-10:30a EST

Wednesday April 13, 2022 2:00p-3:30p EST

Sign up: <https://tiny.utk.edu/STRIDEPilot>

e. Knoxville-Area Sick Leave Bank Enrollment: Begins April 1

Beginning Friday, April 1, 2022 we will be accepting applications for new enrollees in the Knoxville Area and Institute of Agriculture Sick Leave Banks (SLB).

More information: <https://hr.utk.edu/sick-leave-bank/>.

6. REMINDERS

a. Next meeting: April 26, 2022.

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