

PRESENT

Chris Binkley, Mary Beth Burlison, Alicia Calderon (Campus Partner), Jon Chandler, Shane Colter, Darrell Easley, DeAnna Flinchum, John Goddard, Allyson Graves, Laruen Hatcher, Melissa Jenkins, Tarah Keeler, Beth Kurtz, Amanda Middleton, Kim Raia, Shay Riggs, Tonya Sartin, LaShel Stevens, Hillary Tune, Matt Ward, Samantha Ward, Tanya Washington, Leslie Wereszczak, and Lisa Yamagata-Lynch

ABSENT

Michele Atkins, Jamie Cyphers, George Drinnon, Marcus Hilliard, Whitney Jenkins, David Moore, and Sam Smith

1. WELCOME

Shane Colter, Exempt Staff Council (ESC) Chair, welcomed everyone to the August 2024 meeting. The [ESC website](#) has now been updated with the new representatives and their bios.

2. NEW BUSINESS

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

[Annual Compliance Training for 2024](#) is now available to complete in K@TE. This is due on December 31, 2024 and should only take a couple of hours to complete.

Following the success of the Spring networking event, the Career Development team will be hosting a Fall networking event, on October 18th from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., called [Connect the Dots](#) in the Frieson Black Cultural Center. It will be a tailgate theme with some snacks provided. You can register in [K@TE](#) by searching “Connect the Dots.”

Dr. Easley then spoke about the Staff Senate and provided the rationale and benefits of transitioning into a one Staff Senate.

The Employee Relations Advisory Organization (ERAO) was established in 1972 to provide a direct channel of communication between regular, non-exempt staff employees, and university officials for information and

advisory purposes. The Employee Relations Committees (ERC) represent non-exempt staff. In 2004, the Exempt Staff Council joined the ERAO and represents Knoxville-Area exempt staff.

UTK, in partnership with UTIA, is merging the current staff advisory groups (three Employee Relations Committees for non-exempt staff and one Exempt Staff Council) to form one new Staff Senate. This shift is timely given benchmarking and the implementation of DASH. Academic year 2024-2025 will be a transitional year as HR partners with current staff representatives to reimagine the staff advisory groups for our campus and move toward a fall 2025 Staff Senate launch. Elections for the Staff Senate are tentatively set for spring/summer 2025, pending updates to the online election application and DASH implementation. Current representatives are serving an additional 1-year appointment to help with the transition this academic year.

- This change has several benefits. A Staff Senate will:
- Elevate the staff voice in shared governance.
- Mirror peer and aspirant institutions' staff advisory channels.
- Deepen bench strength for representatives serving on other committees on behalf of the Senate (examples: Employee Relations Advisory Board, University Leadership Council, Council for Diversity & Inclusion, Safety Committee, etc.)
- Streamline membership for a more inclusive and evergreen setup based on Division/College/Unit.
- Increase efficiency and reduce the administrative challenges for guest speakers, meeting logistics, minutes, and more.

For questions about the transition to Staff Senate, contact Human Resources at hr@utk.edu or call HR Employee Relations at (865) 974-6642, press 3 for Employee Relations.

- **Committee Updates**

There were no updates provided for the Police Advisory Council, the Council for Diversity and Inclusion, Faculty Senate, and the UTK Collaborative Leadership Council.

The Faculty Senate had a retreat earlier in August 2024 and will have a regular meeting in September 2024.

The UTK Collaborative Leadership Council is working to schedule a meeting in September 2024.

The Employee Relations Advisory Board (ERAB) met to discuss and rethink the purpose and function of the group. Previously, the group met once a year for an informational push meeting, but now the group would like to move to a more engaged model going forward.

The University Leadership Council met and discussed institutional neutrality. Chancellor Plowman spoke about the System policy and the philosophy on institutional and leadership statements. All University Administrators honor the principle of institutional neutrality and refrain from making statements on disputed political, moral, and religious topics. The role of the University is to provide an impartial platform for scholarly debate. It is not to pronounce judgement. This allows the University to be a true marketplace of ideas in which students, faculty, and staff have the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, learn, and discuss any issue. This does not limit anybody; a State employee is not limited in speaking publicly, writing for publications, or saying what their stance is, as long as they are not saying it as a University employee or on behalf of the University. Vice Chancellor for the Division of Student Life Frank Cuevas has been working with UTPD officials to create a de-escalation training program in response to the protests that took place in Spring 2024. Meetings with student organizations have also taken place to reiterate the procedure for creating a protest on campus.

3. CONSTITUENT ISSUES

1. **(Q):** Is there an update regarding the UTK Sick Leave Bank allowing it to be used for minor dependents?
(A): Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for Human Resources Tarah Keeler responded she has brought up the issue to the System HR office and they are currently reviewing the information that was provided.
2. **(Q):** In regards to the Fair Labor Standards Act, what is the update from the System and individual Human Resources teams in regards to their monitoring? Is there an expected change to the salary threshold in the courts ruling before January 1? What is your current school of thought on the “learned profession” exemption and how it will affect different types of employees of the University?
(A): UTK Human Resources is still monitoring this and will make recommendations soon to campus leadership on different approaches that could be taken. At this time, if the salary threshold changes January 1, 2025 it would go forward with no change to the proposed threshold.
3. **(Q):** Does the recent compensation adjustment approved by the Board of Trustees, under which most positions are moved into higher market ranges, apply to all departments at the University? If it does not, why and how was the decision made not to apply those adjustments throughout the university?
(A): The market range changes apply to all positions classified at certain job family roles and levels at UTK.

4. (Q): Would UT consider assisting with phone costs for those who use their personal phone for Ring Central?
(A): Human Resources has reached out to the Budget and Finance Office to inquire, and they responded with the following:
“Here’s the link to fiscal policy FI0730, which addresses technology allowances: [FI0730 - Telephones and Other Communication Devices - UT System Policies \(tennessee.edu\)](#)”
5. (Q): Why does CORVEL need a Social Security Number to report an injury? Why can you not speak to a human during the CORVEL reporting process?
(A): Human Resources connected with the Risk Management Office who shared the following: “If the claimant is/was uncomfortable with confirming the last 4 of their SSN then the intake nurse could have asked to confirm with other identifiers such as employee ID. Call 1-866-245-8588, Option #1 (nurse line). We have detailed reporting procedures on our [website](#).”
6. (Q): How do high-performing long term staff members receive fair salary within the pay range UT has assigned to their position? What does UT HR advise departments to do about low morale resulting from hiring new employees and paying them higher on pay scales than long term employees doing the same work?
(A): Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for Human Resources Tarah Keeler shared that compensation for new staff hires is generally set at the department/college level. The HR Compensation team consults with departments on staff compensation matters during the classification review process and when a departmental compensation review is requested. That team can help answer individual questions staff may have about their compensation, but these questions are best answered by supervisors and/or college/department HR teams as a starting point.
7. (Q): We recently found out that the Arena dining is closing Aug 16th. Why was nothing sent out about this and will anything be replacing it?
(A): Representative Mary Beth Burlison reached out to UT Dining and they responded with, “Thank you for the feedback. It seems like there may be some miscommunication; the hot line is not closing. We are changing out the sandwich side with a pop-up menu for the Fall to draw student attention. However, breakfast will still be available made to order and then the lunch will still be there as well!”

Other Business:

- a. [Benefits Bonanza](#) – September 12, 2024 in the Student Union, room 272
 - b. [Open Enrollment](#) – Begins October 1, 2024 and runs through October 18, 2024
- Next meeting- September 24, 2024 at 2:30 pm EST.
 - Please email Shane Colter (colters@utk.edu) or Sam (samsmith5@utk.edu) with constituent issue or questions the Friday (by noon) before the next meeting.