
PRESENT

Emma Burgin, Sheila Borders (Guest), Jessica Cantu, Tom Cervone, George Drinnon, Darrell Easley, Deanna Flinchum, Kevin Frye, Marcus Hilliard, Elisha Hodge, James Hodge, Rita Jackson, Bonnie Johnson, Janet Jones, Johnny Jones, Beth Kurtz, Mary Lucal, Amber Mathes, Heath Nokes, Blake Reagan, Theresa Sears, Kenny Smith (IPS Leadership Academy) Michael Smith-Porter, Kevin Thompson, Norma Wilcox, Lisa Yamagata-Lynch

ABSENT

Eric Amos, John Goddard, Victoria Leidy, Julie Roe, Kaley Walker, Matt Ward

1. WELCOME

Elisha Hodge, Past Chair and IPS MTAS representative, welcomed everyone to the January meeting. She welcomed Kenny Smith, IPS Leadership Academy observer, and Sheila Borders, who was attending on behalf of John Goddard.

2. UPDATES

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

Dr. Lucal greeted the group and began her update by reminding the group about performance review season. She shared information about [upcoming learning opportunities](#) including performance review workshops for supervisors and employees and programming around the Inclusion, Diversity & Engagement (IDE) category.

Dr. Lucal next discussed the [recent compression adjustment](#) related to the campus' move to a \$15.00 minimum hiring rate. She asked representatives to ensure that constituents who were affected by the compression adjustment received a letter reflecting their adjusted salary. Dr. Lucal shared her appreciation for the adjustment, especially considering the recent rise in inflation.

Ken Wagner reported positive feedback from his constituents around the compression adjustment wage increases. He asked if the effort would be ongoing, especially for longer-term employees. Dr. Lucal thanked Mr. Wagner for the feedback and responded she did not have any news or indication that it will be a regular occurrence. She said that where merit and market money pools exist departments can review their employees' ranges and performance and make adjustments where needed. She reflected on compression related to the wage increase, which was the largest part of the effort at a cost of around 6 million dollars.

3. COMMISSION REPORTS

a. Commission for Blacks – Elisha Hodge

Ms. Hodge reported the [Commission](#) has not yet met in 2022.

b. Commission for LGBT People – Tom Cervone

Tom Cervone reported the [Commission](#) has not yet met in 2022.

c. Council for Diversity and Inclusion – Tom Cervone

Mr. Cervone reported the [Commission](#) met in December. He said they intend to get into subcommittees to discuss ideas and initiatives in 2022. He announced that the Campus Climate survey is in and the Commission is discussing how to implement the instrument.

Mr. Cervone closed by renewing his call for a volunteer to attend CDI on behalf of the Council.

d. Commission for Disability – Emma Burgin

Emma Burgin reported the [Commission](#) recently met. She reflected that they are growing, having doubled in size, and are in the process of planning events for the semester. The events will likely take place in March and April for Autism Awareness Month and Disability Awareness Day.

Dr. Burgin closed her report by encouraging the group to become involved in the Commission and to share any concerns they would like the Commission to think about.

e. Commission for Women – Amber Mathes

Amber Mathes reported the [Commission](#) has not yet met in 2022.

f. Faculty Senate – George Drinnon

George Drinnon reported the [Faculty Senate](#) has not yet met in 2022.

4. CONSTITUENT QUESTIONS

a. Volunteerism Policy

Q: “At our next meeting, the TSAC (Tickle Staff Advisory Council) would like our Volunteer policy discussed. Dean Mench is presenting it to upper administration with his full support, but we aren’t sure when that is happening.

Our original intent was for this to be a TCE policy but with the Chancellor showing interest, it could potentially be a campus policy down the road. I have attached the draft policy. We are hoping to get more input and support for this.”

A: Ms. Hodge asked Ms. Mathes to speak on the proposed policy so the group could determine whether they would like to take it to the Employee Relations Advisory Board (ERAB) for consideration.

Ms. Mathes is on the College of Engineering’s Staff Advisory Council and explained they have been working on a draft volunteer policy. Leah Buffington, the past ESC representative for Engineering, has been a proponent in drafting the policy. Ms. Mathes discussed the intention of the policy, which would make eight hours of paid leave available to every employee to use for volunteer participation each calendar year. She said the Council is trying to encourage the College’s staff to do more volunteer work that benefits the University and community, and that past Dean Janis Terpenny and current Dean Matthew Mench support the effort. Ms. Mathes noted that they had heard Chancellor Plowman showed interest in the policy for the campus, and she was asked to bring it to ESC for consideration.

Bonnie Johnson and George Drinnon noted that volunteer policies are popular with private corporations and are common in industry. Dr. Lucal shared she felt the draft was very well written and answered questions she had in reviewing it.

A discussion took place to clarify what the group was being asked to do: consider advancing the policy to ERAB; or respond to the College as to whether they support the concept of the policy. Ms. Mathes responded both, and that the Council would

appreciate feedback in editing so it could be advanced to Dean Mench and then to ERAB.

Mr. Cervone offered his support for the policy and shared his interest in encouraging volunteerism with the nonprofit community. Mr. Drinnon suggested Ms. Mathes look to the Jones Center for Leadership and Research as they list a variety of service activities that qualify as appropriate for students. Ms. Mathes agreed and said the Committee has been working with the Jones Center. Dr. Lucal shared her suggestions for appropriate service activities and said she felt the policy would strike a chord across the system, especially for UTK given the new [Strategic Vision plan](#).

Ms. Mathes shared her appreciation for the feedback and added that staff who have children can find it difficult to participate in volunteer activities during the weekend. The policy would make it easier for everyone to participate.

b. Voluntary Retirement Incentive Program for Staff

Q: "When will the UT Salary database be updated?"

A: Dr. Lucal responded that the Employee Relations team contacted Brian Hester with Institutional Effectiveness. Mr. Hester responded that their team pulls salary information from IRIS and takes a snapshot every November 20. The data is then validated and shared with payroll for accuracy. Once verified the updates are then uploaded to the salary website, typically by late January. He anticipated the new November 2021 salary data would be uploaded and made public on the website sometime later this week.

Dr. Lucal reminded the group the snapshot will not capture the new minimum hiring rate or compression adjustments that took effect earlier this month.

c. At-Home Covid Test Kits

Q: "Is the University is going to provide at-home COVID tests for employees (rapid tests) (once they are back in stock) not the ones that have to be sent off that are now available at the clinic for employees. Like they sent us that first mask and antibacterial. This seems like a great way to plan for the future and not be reactive.

As examples:

“The goal of offering that is providing comfort to our employees so they don’t have to unnecessarily worry or be burdened by having to find a test outside the home,” said Sean Woodroffe, the firm’s head of human resources.”

“BlackRock, which has more than 7,600 U.S. employees and has extended its work-from-home flexibility through Jan. 28, offers its staff up to one at-home P.C.R. testing kit each week, up to six monthly at-home antigen kits for employees or their family members exposed to Covid, and telehealth supervision for self-administered rapid tests needed for international travel, an option begun over the December holidays. At Morgan Stanley, bankers can receive up to four free BinaxNOW tests, which cost about \$40 in stores, every two weeks through a third party, though the shortage of tests has delayed shipment arrival. At JPMorgan, where corporate employees said they were told last month that they could temporarily work from home because of the fast-spreading Omicron variant, bankers can order rapid tests.

“TIAA, an investment firm with 12,000 workers in the United States, began offering free at-home testing to its staff in December 2020. The majority of its employees have worked from home since the start of the pandemic, though roughly 5 percent had been coming into the office last year. There is no limit on the number of tests employees can order, for themselves as well as their families, according to a spokeswoman, Jessica Scott.

“The goal of offering that is providing comfort to our employees so they don’t have to unnecessarily worry or be burdened by having to find a test outside the home,” said Sean Woodroffe, the firm’s head of human resources.

“TIAA is considering expanding its testing options, by exploring a partnership with the company Detect, which makes at-home molecular tests. “We’re not hoarding tests,” Mr. Woodroffe added. “We have tests to fulfill our demand.”

A: Dr. Lucal responded that, at this time, there are no plans to distribute at-home Covid test kits to employees. She reminded the group that home Covid tests are [available at the Student Health Center](#).

Additionally, the Federal Government is now making four free at-home test kits available to every home. She shared her experience in ordering the kits online from [COVIDtests.gov](#). Ms. Hodge also shared that Partners for Health recently sent out information about [insurance participants being eligible to get covered test kits](#) as part of the CVS pharmacy benefit.

d. Voluntary Retirement Incentive Plan

Q: “I keep thinking about the voluntary retirement plan that was just offered to faculty and nothing was done for Staff Exempt. When I was hired, I was the [program] Coordinator, but I have always taught two more courses each semester—in addition to all of the clerical and administrative work that I have done!

I don’t think this is fair. Has your committee discussed this with anyone?”

A: Dr. Lucal responded this was discussed before when the plan was presented to the Board of Trustees at the October meeting. She said there are many staff who teach some classes but said the distinction between a staff and faculty member is that faculty members have appointment letters and their primary purpose is as a faculty member.

Dr. Lucal explained the decision was ultimately made that VRIP would be specifically limited to faculty because of the unique needs on the faculty side, but that the Chancellor said a staff retirement incentive may be considered in the future.

e. Extension Agents Classification

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: Doug Bohner, UTIA Chief Human Resources Officer, and John Toman, Extension HR Director, responded, “As the situation is fluid, we would like to confirm UTIA’s response with the Dean. A response will be shared at the next meeting.”

Heath Nokes cited the question as being likely related to VRIP. Sheila Borders discussed her experience in Extension. She explained that when she started 26 years ago Extension Agents were considered both faculty and federal employees, but that changed shortly after her hire date. She discussed her understanding of the benefit of being designated as faculty including increased opportunities for career advancement and research funding.

Mr. Nokes and Rita Jackson added to the discussion about advancement within Extension, and Kenny Smith offered his experience with IPS working closely with Extension in consulting and teaching. A discussion about faculty designation and career opportunities took place. Lisa Yamatata-Lynch shared her experience as a faculty member, noting that in hiring they typically look for terminal degrees. She also reflected on her transition from faculty to staff and how that is a very different set of work expectations and governance.

Dr. Borders noted that because Agents are not considered faculty, they cannot be a principal investigator on a grant project and must instead rely on another faculty member in order to secure funding.

A discussion about the benefits of faculty status, accreditation, and personal experiences took place. Ms. Hodge shared her appreciation to the group for their responses and said she looked forward to the response from UTIA HR at the next meeting.

f. Legal Benefits

Q: “My husband had Hyatt Legal Plan as a benefit, and it was great. I was wondering if that is something we could explore offering? I believe we paid the entire premium, no cost to the employer, I don’t recall it being very expensive. It covered a wide variety of things. Attached is a picture I found online. It did not cover anything employer-related. If this is not something to bring to you, please let me know.”

A: Darrell Easley responded that, before the meeting, Jessica Cantu reached out to Rob Chance, Director of Payroll. Mr. Chance replied that he did not believe the state would consider adding legal services beyond Optum at this time.

University employees have existing access to free and discounted legal assistance services through our Employee Assistance Program vendor, Here4TN, which is managed by Optum.

The [legal services benefit](#) includes access to licensed state-specific attorneys, one 60-minute consultation per issue per year at no cost, and ongoing representation by an attorney at a 25% discounted rate. Additionally, Here4TN provides free access to self-help legal documents including wills, living trusts, and deeds.

EAP member benefits and services also include WorkLife searches, financial wellness tools, coaching, and identity theft resources and assistance. EAP benefits are available to all benefits-eligible higher education employees and their eligible family members, even if they are not enrolled in medical insurance.

For more information about all available Optum benefits, visit <https://www.here4tn.com/> or call 1-855-Here4TN (855-437-3486)

5. OTHER BUSINESS

a. General Announcements

Ms. Hodge announced that Victoria Leidy, representative for Law, Communications, Nursing & Architecture, accepted a new position and would no longer be able to

serve. Employee Relations is currently working to secure a new representative for that area to fill the vacancy.

Dr. Lucal announced that HR is seeking both HR and Compensation Analysts and encouraged the group to share the position opportunities with their constituents.

Mr. Cervone announced that the [Clarence Brown Theatre](#) is preparing for the opening of “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time”. He encouraged the group to consider attending one of the upcoming performances.

b. Resources for Online Performance Reviews

Dr. Easley announced that staff performance reviews for the 2021 review cycle are now available in the [Online Performance Review \(OPR\) system](#). Select “2021 Annual Performance Review” from the dropdown menu. Supervisors who need to access 2020 reviews can do that as well from the same menu. Staff performance reviews are due March 31 each year.

There are several resources available as you prepare for this review cycle. Visit the [Human Resources website](#) to learn more. FAQs and video tutorials are also available on the Staff Performance Reviews page.

Dr. Lucal asked the group to share information about [upcoming performance review trainings](#) and stressed the importance of reviews being a two-way conversation. She noted that Dr. Yamagata-Lynch and the [Office of Ombuds Services](#) work with HR on review issues around evaluation time, and shared her hope that if staff can be better engaged in the process it would be a better experience for all involved.

Dr. Yamagata-Lynch confirmed that the Ombuds office sees visitor peaks during evaluation times for faculty, staff, and graduate students. She also announced that [Dr. Donna Hicks](#), an expert on conflict resolution and dignity, will be visiting campus soon.

c. Mobile Mammography

The UT Breast Health Outreach Program will bring its Mobile Mammography Unit to Circle Park on Monday, February 28, 2022, for campus community wellness screenings.

Appointments are required and may be scheduled by calling 865-839-7416 or emailing: lking@utmck.edu.

After the meeting, UTK HR learned the Mobile Mammography event had been canceled. A second date has been scheduled for Thursday, May 12.

6. REMINDERS

- a. Next meeting: February 22, 2022.
- b. Please email constituent questions to Elisha Hodge (elisha.hodge@tennessee.edu) or Jessica Cantu (jlcantu@utk.edu).