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PRESENT

Chris Binkley, Jon Chandler, Shane Colter, George Drinnon, Darrell Easley, DeAnna Flinchum, John Goddard, Gina Hale, Rita Jackson, Melissa Jenkins, Bonnie Johnson, Johnny Jones, Beth Kurtz, Mary Lucal, David Moore, Kim Raia, Julie Roe, Kirsten Schroeder, Christina Sharp, Andrea Stedman, Ken Wagner, Tanya Washington, Matt Ward, Leslie Wereszczak, Norma Wilcox, and Lisa Yamagata-Lynch

ABSENT

Emma Burgin, Marcus Hilliard, James Hodge, Rachel McClelland, Blake Reagan, Michael Smith-Porter, and Kevin Thompson

1. WELCOME

Dr. Mary Lucal, Associate Vice Chancellor for UT Knoxville Human Resources, welcomed everyone to the August meeting. She wished everyone a happy first week of fall semester 2022.

Dr. Lucal shared a few HR updates with the Council. Most notable has been the remarkable hiring increase. In addition, she shared that she has spoken with academic leadership about feedback from staff via surveys, exit interviews, and other avenues. Staff have expressed interest in the topics of career and professional development. Lisa Yamagata-Lynch, Ombuds, added these are also themes on the Ombuds annual report. Research shows that many employees are looking for other jobs but institutions may be able to retain them if they elevate their career development efforts for staff. Lastly Dr. Lucal noted that roughly 2,700 students moved in on Monday with another 700 slated for today – it is a busy, busy time as we welcome all the new students to campus!

Before moving to constituent questions, the main goal for this meeting is for the council to elect a new Chair, First Vice Chair, and Second Vice Chair for the academic year 2022-2023. There was some discussion about the open positions. Julie Roe, Human Resources, shared the names of those that were nominated and agreed to run in an election. The council voted via zoom poll. John Goddard was elected Chair, Beth Kurtz as First Vice Chair, and Shane Colter as Second Vice Chair. It was a close vote for Second Vice Chair and Ken Wagner agreed to serve as back-up support. Dr. Lucal expressed gratitude to all of those that volunteered to serve in these leadership roles and to everyone who participated in the election.

## 2. CONSTITUENT QUESTIONS

### a. Departmental Merit Decisions & Communication

Question(s): “Has there ever been discussions or would a policy be considered to make the merit increase clearer cut? There are so many assumptions once the email goes out that indicates the approved percentage. Then when it comes to merit time some departments talk to their employees, some get an email about their merit, some get a paper letter, some get nothing and just notice an increase in pay. Is merit based on your last performance review? How is market considered? If someone has not been at UT 6 months and not had their probationary review, should they get merit? If someone received a job promotion (changed positions/departments) or received job reclassification that resulted in a pay increase very close to merit time should they receive full merit, a low percentage, or none? If you are promoted from one department to another how is your merit handled? Is it discussed with a previous supervisor or is your performance review looked at? I am hearing that employees are wanting more consistency.”

Dr. Lucal introduced Jon Chandler, HR Employee Relations, and Kirsten Schroeder, HR Compensation, to discuss these questions. Jon shared that in his role in HR he emphasizes the importance of communication around merit from leadership. Departments and divisions have autonomy on how they prefer to communicate with staff about merit decisions. As a result, methods vary across campus: letter, meeting, both, neither, and so on. In any case, HR encourages communication on the topic and transparency. There can be many factors related to merit decisions, including the previous year’s performance. Kirsten Schroeder discussed the merit process when reclassification or transfer is involved. For example, when a position changes and requires reclassification it is important to consider whether the salary increase includes merit (for future) or not. There should be discussion around the salary increase and/or merit as applicable so the employee understands when/if merit is awarded. Another example is an employee transfer. The new department (receiving department) is responsible for merit. Does the starting salary include merit or not? If not, there should also be discussion with the candidate at the time of hire.

Timing: In addition, staff performance reviews look at performance in the previous calendar year. However, merit increases are implemented for the academic year, in other words, those on payroll as of June 30 may be eligible for market increases. Departments also have the discretion to address equity issues.

Dr. Lucal noted that sometimes there is a lack of transparency within departments and/or divisions on how these decisions are made and that may be the genesis of this agenda item. That said, while it varies between divisions, the plan should be consistent internally.

There are options for employees with specific questions – go back to the business office for the unit to inquire internally or the employee may contact HR and ask that HR provide the feedback to the department that there is a misunderstanding about how merit is applied.

Gina Hale asked about a 6-month probationary review. Dr. Lucal noted that this year's merit guidelines say that someone must have a performance review on file. If an employee is not eligible for merit (for example, a newer employee) they may be eligible for a market adjustment.

Andrea Stedman asked if cost of living adjustments fall under market and if the university has/would consider an across-the-board raise. Dr. Lucal shared that an across-the-board adjustment would be a separate category and there would be system guidelines on that. It is different year-to-year and merit/market are separate from across-the-board raises. The university has had them in the past but not in recent years. System guidelines are reviewed and distributed each year. Discussion was held around the topic of cost of living related to across-the-board and merit increases. Some staff expressed interest in both. John Goddard added that this type of feedback is important. Feedback from the ESC and constituents was helpful in the recent increase for mileage reimbursements.

b. Mobile Taleo Access for Applicants Without Computer Access

Question(s): "I would like to bring an issue to the table regarding new employees and the onboarding process. The current method of communication for any new employee or even an applicant is done via email. This is wonderful for the University, but not so great for the applicants – especially in non-exempt custodial and maintenance personnel. Email works great for links and access but only if a computer is used. Most of our applicants do not have outside access to computers. They can go to HR, but this in itself has its frustrations. Is HR actively working to make this process easier by making sure that the online links, activations, etc. are able to be done on mobile devices (phones, tablets, etc.)?"

Dr. Lucal shared a response from Chelsey Byrd, Recruitment Manager:

"In recent developments and updates, all aspects of our application and onboarding processes have been made mobile friendly and compatible. Any actions required of an applicant or new hire can be completed on mobile devices and tablets, however, there are some issues that could still persist that would be specific to the candidate. The following are listed below, along with a solution or contextual response:

- Difficulty attaching files for a submission or new application.
  - If completing this on a mobile device, the applicant will need to have those files on their mobile device whether that is in a cloud service, an email, etc. Though, you can technically complete an application without attachments, many positions require at minimum a resume. In reference to non-exempt applicants that may not have computer access, it is also understood that they may not have a resume as a result. However, best practice is to only consider the information provided by the applicant in their actual application to give fair consideration in situations of that nature; thus, as long as all candidates complete their application thoroughly and, in its entirety, this would not be an area of concern or a hinderance.

- Difficulty Accessing Taleo – This can be a result of many possibilities.
  - Candidates may not remember their credentials or password. In this instance, they can contact our HR Office and we can provide their login information and reset passwords if needed, but they must still have access to the email address the account was created with.
  - Candidates may have more than one profile. We can assist with this in a similar fashion as lost or forgotten credentials.
  - Lack of an email address. This is the only truly hindering situation that we run into. In these scenarios we would recommend setting up a free google account, or asking for the email of a family member or friend that they could utilize for onboarding and access.

Over time, we have found that some browsers do not work as well with Taleo and other systems utilized by our university. We recommend that on all devices, applicants and new hires utilize Safari or Google Chrome. FireFox is often not compatible with certain plug-ins.”

c. Fee Discounts and Mandatory Fees

Question(s): “Recently a colleague paid his daughter’s tuition to UT Chattanooga for 6 summer credit hours. The total was \$1,800 for the undergraduate maintenance fee (tuition) and \$1,084 for 13 various mandatory fees. The two classes were held virtually, and the student was not living on campus. A 50% employee discount for tuition reduced the \$1800 maintenance fee to \$900 (1/2 of the tuition), but the discount did not apply to 13 other various mandatory fees. When the other fees are included in the final term balance, the 50% UT Spouse/Dependent waiver is technically only a 31% reduction in the full cost of attending classes.

For fall semester 2022, the same full-time student at UTC can expect to pay \$5996. The maintenance fee (tuition) accounts for \$3996. The 50% fee discount applies to this maintenance fee but does not apply to the remaining \$2000 charged in various fees including facility fees, transportation fees, debt service fees, library fees, online support fees, green fees, athletics fees, technology fees, and health fees. While these extra fees likely cover essential administrative functions for the campus, we question why this additional 33% cost would not also be included in the waiver, since most of the fee categories are also related to the delivery of academic instruction. In this second scenario, the 50% UT Spouse/Dependent waiver is technically only a 33% reduction in the full cost of attending classes.

Some Questions for the Exempt Staff Council:

- As mandatory fees increase, should HR and the Board of Trustees revisit HR0331?
- Could UT HR0331 – Educational Assistance (Student Fee Discount) for Spouses and Dependent Children of Employees – item #3 be changed to include mandatory fees as part of the 50% discount?

- As mandatory fees increase, the UT employee benefit is reduced. Can Exempt Council consider this item for discussion and review?"

Dr. Lucal shared that she will bring this item up with the statewide Human Resources Officers. She also suggested the Council consider putting this forward at the statewide Employee Relations Advisory Board (ERAB) meeting. Kim Raia shared this item came from her constituency and she can share more information with the Council on the research behind this question. John Goddard asked that Kim share the information with the group in advance of the next ESC meeting in September.

Leslie Wereszczak also asked if the Council would inquire if there could be consideration given to the fee discount (for spouse and dependents) to apply to graduate studies. Dr. Lucal suggested this be included with the aforementioned questions for ERAB review. This would require system policy review.

George Drinnon added that decision makers will need to think about the source of funding for this benefit. If we're looking at expanding the benefit there should also be discussion around the source of benefits. Ken Wagner added that colleges may be adding fees as a result of the budget allocation model. These are things to keep in mind as the Council brainstorms solutions for funding sources and considers submitting a proposal to ERAB.

### 3. OTHER BUSINESS

- a. Save the Date: Annual Enrollment

The [annual open enrollment](#) period is October 1 – 14, 2022. Be sure to take some time to review your benefits and make any necessary changes.

Jon Chandler thanked everyone for their attendance and again welcomed the newly elected officers.

### 4. REMINDERS

- a. Next meeting: September 27, 2022 from 2:30 – 3:00 p.m. eastern via zoom.
- b. Please email constituent questions to Sam Smith ([samsmith5@utk.edu](mailto:samsmith5@utk.edu)) or Jon Chandler ([jchand41@utk.edu](mailto:jchand41@utk.edu)).