

Staff Senate Minutes

October 12, 2023

**CALL TO ORDER**

President Kristian Thompson called the Arkansas Tech University Staff Senate meeting to order on Thursday October 12, 2023 at 9:03 a.m. in a hybrid in-person and WebEx virtual online meeting.

**ROLL CALL**

**Senators Present:**

Sabrina Anwar  
Rachel Broussard  
Deidra Dillard  
Slade Dupuy  
Julie Ennis

Connie Herring  
Kim Hilliard  
Katie Hook  
Whitney Moore  
Tanda Morrison

Tammy Rye  
Miranda Senn  
Kristian Thompson  
Scott Tomlin

**Senators Absent:**

Peggy Ayers  
Kacie Lopez

Amber Jacimore  
Cody Neal

Krystal Manning

**Visitor(s):**

Adrienne McNeely  
Alexis Scrimshire  
Amber Meeks  
Amy Anderson  
Andrea Eubanks  
Angela Westbrook  
Ashley Bryant  
Brandi Tripp  
Brittany Reves  
Desiree Wait  
Jennifer Taylor  
Julia Pope

Kim McKown  
Lindsey Riedmueller  
Mackenzie Bray  
Marcia Brown  
Marika Lederman  
Melissa South  
Michan Chowritmootoo  
Miranda Marin  
Nicole Edwards  
Stephanie Swatzel  
Tanya Martin

### **Approval of Previous Minutes**

The minutes from the September 7, 2023 meeting were distributed electronically prior to the meeting. Senator Dillard filed a motion to accept the minutes. Senator Dupuy seconded the motion. The minutes were approved by Senate vote.

### **Special Guest**

Interim President Dr. Jones and EC member Laury Fiorello.

### **Special Report**

Dr. Jones started by thanking us for having him on. He stated that the first thing he wanted to talk about was the summer hours. Staff Senate brought him the question of having summer hours during other times of the year. He visited around with EC and they believe that is something that we can make happen. This would mean that departments could give their teams the option to work longer days during the week and take a half day on Friday. If approved we would be able to start it the Monday after graduation and run it through Christmas break. We would also be able to participate during spring break. Now rather than calling them summer hours, we'd be calling them holiday hours.

Now there are some areas of exceptions to the holiday hours. There are still some essential areas that would need to be covered and there are still some details that need to be worked out before it can be fully approved. He is hoping to get those details ironed out and approved during their next meeting so that we can put the holiday hours into effect for this December.

He also wanted to briefly talk about the student union and the possibility of the design changing but wanted to leave most of it with Laury to speak about. However, he did speak with SGA and he was so impressed with that group. What struck him the most was how much they cared. Even though the student union won't be finished until most of them had graduated, the group still cared about the legacy that would be left behind for their brothers, sisters, children, the next generations, and it really made him feel good to know that they cared rather than having a student government that had the opinion of "we won't be here, it doesn't really matter."

SGA has been sending in lots of questions that they have about the Union and any changes that might be made. They are also meeting with the Student Union Task Force that is comprised of students as well. It is primarily the students' building so he wants to make sure we have their input and it is great to see that they care and ask questions.

He reminded us that since the last Staff Senate meeting, the Administration building and Tomlinson building were both approved for demolition. Obviously with that, there is some displacement with staff and faculty. Everyone in the Admin building, with the exception of Advancement, is going to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the library. Those offices were available because OIS moved to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Brown. We also moved HR back on campus. He feels that it is more convenient for the employees and keeps from everyone having to go off campus. So, HR is on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Brown where they were previously. Advancement has moved out to the building where HR was, 715 El Paso. He said they felt that they were the ones with the most outside contacts in businesses so if somebody had to be off campus, they felt it would be more appropriate for them to be the ones.

There were only a handful of employees in Tomlinson. One faculty member who was relocated to a new area with a lab. Then the graduate school who has also been relocated to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Brown. So other than the groans of having to move, it seems as though everyone is happy that they got nicer spaces. Moving has happened with minimal problems and minimal costs. The whole move will be completed in about 2 weeks.

Next, we had Laury Fiorello give us some updates about the major construction projects. The Student Union is being proposed to be reduced in square footage. We are proposing two schematics to the Board members. Each design will reduce the building by about 45,000 square feet. One schematic will do away with the second story all together. The second design keeps the second floor but takes space off the sides. In both scenarios, one basketball court and all of the meeting spaces would be erased. What we would be keeping is "the core," which is the student areas. Although the weight room may shrink as well as a workout room. Chelsea's group would still move over to the Union, as before, as well as SGA. The convenience store and the food service would stay in the designs. Essentially, the two designs come down to aesthetics and the board members will help to decide which we go with.

Laury wanted to stress that we are not taking any of the student related programming out of the building. She doesn't want the students to think they are paying for something that is less of a building. She mentioned the walking track would also be removed from the designs. She said some may interpret that as a student area but they felt that the community would take advantage of the track more than the students.

Altogether this would mean a less expensive building. We will save about 15 million. However, we will not be reducing the bond size. The bondage is still 29.8 million and we owe that money back to the bondholders and that debt payment will stay the same for the next 30 years. The fee to the student will still be based off that debt service. She and Dr. Jones will be meeting with SGA President Hannah Stone to make sure she has what she needs to communicate that information to the students. However, with that 15 million released, we will be able to do other capital projects that otherwise, we'd have to increase another fee. So even though the student fee will not change with the reduced building size, we will be able to improve other buildings without having to add a new fee to students.

In a previous board meeting, it was mentioned that we would be taking about a bond for capital improvement plans. The question was asked if this would mean we don't take that bond out since we are saving money. Laury said that would not be the case. As things are now, every building issue is an emergency. She doesn't have any reserve money for when issues come about for reactive situations. For lack of a better term, Laury said we are living paycheck to paycheck. We ARE meeting our current bills but every emergency that happens, impacts us operationally.

Next, Laury wanted to speak about the school entrance that is being designed along with the city. This project is temporarily on hold. In August, the board members did not approve the bids we got for constructing the entrance. The bids were just too high and it wasn't in our best interest to keep adding to the debt for a cosmetic feature. So, this project is on hold until we can figure out how to value engineer, work with the city and ARDOT, to create a good plan.

Another project Laury wanted to speak to was the demolition of Tomlinson and the Admin building. Demolition is scheduled to start as soon as all individuals have moved from the building since there is asbestos in both buildings due to their age. Kinkos will expand their operations from the foundation of the Student Union to those buildings.

Once a schematic is picked for the Student Union, it will take about 6 months to get the new plans in. We don't want to waste that time. Kinko has offered to demo the two buildings at a discounted price and insert a parking lot. That new parking lot will aid parking to RCB, Browning, Caraway, the Union once built, and it will have close proximity to Crabaugh as well. It could also be easier to get to Hull from that side. ADA parking will be included in the new lot. Kinko will also handle the asbestos in both buildings in the safest way possible. The Young building also had asbestos and was handled safely when it was torn down. Tomlinson and the Admin building will be handled the same way.

As far as current parking, the demo of buildings shouldn't affect parking much. We are anticipating to lose two parking spots at most during the actual demolition. Once demo is over, those spots should be available again. Also, with the Admin employees moving to the library, that should open up some parking spots as well.

Additionally, Laury wanted to speak on staffing. She understands that it can be hard to fill positions at the time. She wanted to remind us that we no longer have Classified positions. All staff moved to Non-Classified positions. Even though your title may not have changed, your classification did. So how do we keep positions filled? If you look at FAMA and at the Custodian positions, we seem to perpetually have 20 vacancies because we can't keep people in those positions. Now that we have more ability to bring positions to CUPA pay, we will be able to slowly raise the pay for those positions. That will help keep those positions filled. However, that takes time.

Laury has another idea that we can do more quickly to get those positions filled and keep them filled. She is proposing that we take 10 of those positions and convert them to part time, 24 hours a week, (for example) and advertise them only to students and we offer them a Faculty Staff Waiver of 25%. This keeps them in school and keeps them in the position for the length of time that they take to graduate. This can help not only our staffing problem but also our retention problem. A university employed student is more likely to continue school than a student who is not employed or employed off campus.

Dr. Jones has allowed Laury to research to see if this idea is feasible and plausible because this is a win win situation. There will not be a set wage for this program. It will just depend on the position that they get. The students will still have to apply for the position through a vetting process and the students will have to be in a degree seeking status.

Departments will not be able to use College work study or Non-College work study for this program. These students will be in full time, appropriated title, positions. Laury is working on a list of qualifying positions that would work for this position as well. This position is not intended to replace any full-time positions that are putting in 40 hours a week. This is intended to fill positions that we've had open for 2 years because we can't get them filled consistently. Laury also believes that this is a good way for us to get in front as a regional state university.

Even though Laury would like to get this program up and running as soon as possible, she wants to do her diligence and research and document this project the right way. However, the target is to roll this out about July of this year. She'd want to start presenting it in April as an item at the board meeting. She also expects to advertise these positions through Cornerstone, our current advertising software. This means we wouldn't have to pay for any other software to advertise the program.

Lastly, Laury reminded everyone that after Staff Senate, there would be a budget meeting. This will be an introductory meeting so there shouldn't be anything too exciting. She said the meetings you'd want to be sure to tune into for would be the January and March meetings.

**Old Business/Discussion**

Staff Senate survey is coming up in November so we want everyone to start talking about that within your departments. Everyone on that committee needs to get together to start planning that meeting and getting questions together. We need to get that survey sent out mid to late November. We want to make sure as many people as possible take this survey. Not just the overjoyed, not just the very angry, but everyone. President Thompson will start getting meeting times together on that Webex group.

We'd like to welcome Scott Tomlin to the Senate as a new member! We still have one more opening in the category of Admin and Finance. We are accepting nominations for a new Senate member in that category. If more than one person accepts their nominations, we will hold elections.

Homecoming is quickly approaching, November 4<sup>th</sup>. President Thompson thought it would be a good idea to have homecoming tailgating so we can have a Staff Senate presence there. Senator Neal is helping Thompson with that. President Thompson wants us to bring our family, kids, etc. to come out and have a good time and watch the homecoming game.

Faculty Staff Halloween party is coming up October 31<sup>st</sup>. Come out and enjoy the party and there will also be a Costume contest. So come out to the Chambers West Dining hall in your best Halloween attire, enjoy networking, food, and fun!

**Concerns & Questions brought to Staff Senate**

<p>For HR events, like the Halloween party, Holiday party, Milestone ceremony, etc. not everyone gets to go because we are told to make sure to keep the office open and stagger attendance. However, that doesn't normally work out and employees miss out. It would be nice to be able to close the office so everyone can attend.</p>	<p>President and Vice President Thompson and Herring have visited with Dr. Jones and Laury on this matter. They are still discussing it and hope to have something decided before the Halloween party.</p>
<p>Pot holes in the parking lots. Drainage issues that cause the sidewalks by Brown to be covered in water.</p>	<p>The parking lots have been paved now so the pot holes aren't as much of a problem. However, the drainage problems between MM and JJ lots have been discussed with Drew. He said that they are much larger issues than simple drainage problem. Drew is looking into short term fixes to ease things up a bit.</p>
<p>Can we look into allowing employees to donate sick and/or vacation leave to each other outside of CAT leave?</p>	<p>Laury has investigated this and this is all a state driven aspect. The state specifically regulates that those hours can only be donated to CAT leave. So unfortunately, time can not be donated directly to employees outside of the CAT program.</p>

<p>I don't feel as though I should be forced to use my banked holiday time or vacation time when the University closes during Christmas break.</p>	<p>This is still being investigated and researched. There was actually a really good conversation about this with Dr. Jones and Laury. They are looking at giving employees the option to take these days off or bank them. They are looking to identify which holidays would be eligible without giving the appearance of discounting other holidays. Updates will come as we get them.</p>
<p>Has the insurance committee met and investigated other plans for lower rates and better coverage?</p>	<p>The current insurance rates came in as a lower increase than expected and the university is going to absorb that increase so that the employees will not feel the impact. Laury did look into trying to change the deductible but it would cost the employees a large increase to change that plan. The increase would be as large as double digit increases.</p>
<p>I am concerned about the eclipse and schools being closed as well as issues with parking, cell service, getting to and from work, etc.</p>	<p>There is a whole committee regarding the eclipse and issues like these are being discussed in said committee. It is being highly hypothesized that we will be working from home the Friday before through the eclipse event. Decisions are still being made about all of this. Susan West is a great contact on this matter and we will look at getting Susan in one of our meetings as a guest speaker.</p>

**Meeting Adjourned**

President Thompson asked if there were any motions to adjourn the meeting. Senator Tomlin made the motion and Senator Dillard seconded. The meeting was dismissed at 9:50am.

Respectfully submitted,  
Whitney Moore, Secretary