

Staff Senate Minutes

March 7, 2024

**CALL TO ORDER**

Vice President Connie Herring called the Arkansas Tech University Staff Senate meeting to order on Thursday March 7, 2024 at 9:03 a.m. in a hybrid in-person and WebEx virtual online meeting.

**ROLL CALL**

**Senators Present:**

Sabrina Anwar  
Peggy Ayers  
Rachel Broussard  
Deidra Dillard  
Slade Dupuy  
Julie Ennis

Connie Herring  
Kim Hilliard  
Kacie Lopez  
Katie Hook  
Amber Jacimore  
Whitney Moore

Tanda Morrison  
Tammy Rye  
Miranda Senn  
Scott Tomlin

**Senators Absent:**

Bethany Brown  
Krystal Manning

Cody Neal

Kristian Thompson

**Visitor(s):**

Alexis Scrimshire  
Alisa Waniewski  
Amber Meeks  
Angela Westbrook  
Ashley Bryant  
Billi Jones  
Brandi Duvall  
Deanna Kile  
George Brooks  
Janet Carnahan-Lee  
Kaylin Telford  
Kristie Moore

Leigh Hill  
Lisa Gibson  
Marcia Brown  
Meaghan Wilt  
Melissa South  
Pam Cooper  
Samantha Huggins  
Shirley Bonner  
Stephanie Swatzel  
Suzanne McCall  
Victoria Tomlin

## **Approval of Previous Minutes**

The minutes from the February 1, 2024 meeting were distributed electronically prior to the meeting. Senator Tomlin filed a motion to accept the minutes with the caveat that a typo he found gets reviewed and altered if necessary. Senator Dillard seconded the motion so the minutes were approved by Senate vote contingent on fixing the error.

## **Special Guest**

President of ATU Dr. Jones, EC member Laury Fiorello, and HR Director Melissa Riffle

## **Special Report**

Dr. Jones wanted to share his thoughts on the Staff Senate Survey that was completed. He read through the entire document and almost uniformly, the comments were about pay. He is working on getting a pool of money set aside and then think of a way to distribute that money between faculty and staff. He said he is a person that believes in merit pay. However, he feels like two components must be true before implementing merit raises.

First, everyone needs to be at their proper base pay. Secondly, we need an evaluation system that is mature. Otherwise, he feels as though we may as well be throwing darts at a board. So, he would like for us to work on those two components so that we can start looking at merit raises. In order to do that, departments need to be looking at their staff, looking at their job descriptions, and seeing how far off they are from 90% CUPA. We need to get appropriate titles to employees that reflect what they are actually doing. We need to know how far off we are to know where we are going. While we work towards getting everyone to their correct base pay, the university will also be working on a mature evaluation system. The hope is that by the time everyone is paid correctly, we will have a mature evaluation system, then we can start giving merit raises in a correct and appropriate manner.

Laury and Melissa both indicated that they are working on training for supervisors to learn how to update job descriptions and find those appropriate CUPA titles.

Another idea that Staff Senate leaders brought to Dr. Jones was the thought of awards for staff similar to the awards that are given out to faculty at graduation. And, similar to the awards given to faculty, the staff awards will be accompanied with a monetary prize. Dr. Jones wants to make sure to do a soft announcement of the award to the winner personally and then announce it at graduation as well.

The budget will due in a couple of months but Dr. Jones said, a lot of what happens next will depend on the enrollment for the fall. Since our budget is so tied to the enrollment, if the numbers don't pick up, we may not be able to give raises in the fall. If fall enrollment meets our expectations, we would expect to see raises in January. Worst case scenario, we could be looking at raises the next year.

We were also given an update on the student union by Laury. The design change was approved in December. It went right back to the architect firm for redesign. Once the new blueprint is created and agreed upon, KINCO is going to give us a guaranteed maximum price bid. We are hoping the design is done and the bid is in by the end of April. After that, we are estimating for late May or early June to have the final price point and give them authorization to move forward. We probably won't see any dirt moving until mid to late June. That puts us about a year behind our original start date.

There is no way for us to make up being a year behind in construction. But, based on the earliest predictions, we could see the union open in March 2026. More realistically, we would see employees moving into the union during summer 2026 and have the grand opening in August of 2026. Where Admin and Tomlinson buildings were, there will be a parking lot that compliments the union and surrounding buildings.

There is a new possible exciting feature going in at the football field. Abby has purchased a new scoreboard using an internal loan and that will be going up pretty quickly. There are thoughts, however, that the scoreboard's quality and size will allow us to host family movie nights on the football field. Families could bring their picnic blankets and bag chairs and watch a Disney movie. This is not something set in stone but, other schools that have bought the same board, have been able to host similar events.

### **Senate Discussion**

As stated above, Staff Senate has been granted permission to give out awards similar to the ones Faculty Senate hands out. The award titles will be ATU Outstanding Employee of the Year, ATU Service Award, and ATU Community Service Award. Staff Senate will be nominating staff members and then the Staff Senate members on the voting committee will vote on who should be granted the award based on the nomination put in by other Senate members.

We have 4 senate members that will be rolling off in June. Vice President Herring will send out how many and in what section of the university so you can get an idea of who you want to nominate to fill their spots along with the new spots we were granted earlier this year. We will start that process in May. It is also time to elect officers for the next season of Staff Senate. They wouldn't start their roles until July 1<sup>st</sup> but in the constitution, it states to start doing elections in April to ensure a smooth transition of responsibilities if needed.

### **Committee Updates:**

- Budget Committee
  - Committee discussed differential fees in depth. Next meeting is March 14th
- Campus Space Committee
  - No update
- Emergency Management Committee
  - No update
- ~~Diversity Committee~~ Access and Equity Committee
  - Committee updated its name. This is the last year in the Strategic Plan of Excellence for Inclusion. So, the subcommittees of students, faculty, and staff are working to make new goals and plans for 2025
- International Travel Advisory Committee
  - No update
- Technology Committee
  - No update
- Insurance Benefits Committee
  - This update has been spoken about in the Special Report above. They discussed ideas for research for wellness and will meet again March 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- Presidential Communication
  - There was an update given on the Chancellor job opening. There were 667 students who attended Time Out for Tech. Performance Evaluations are due by the end of March.

Work with your supervisor to get both the employee and supervisor side done before April. We will be doing Summer Hours during Spring Break. Work with your supervisor on the plan for your department on how to get your full 40 hours in that week. Summer Hours will pick back up again after graduation (May 13<sup>th</sup>-August 9<sup>th</sup>)

- Eclipse Planning Committee
  - No update in President Thompson's absence

**Concerns & Questions brought to Staff Senate**

<p>Other schools have initiatives that allow them 3 hours per week of release time for physical fitness purposes. This could range from a physical fitness class to something as simple as allowing employees time to walk at Tucker. This would be beneficial for both mental health and work efficiency. Is this something ATU could eventually adopt?</p>	<p>This has been added as an agenda item with the insurance committee to be reviewed. Just keep in mind that we are required by the state to work our 40 hours. They regulate our holidays and our work schedules. So, if we gave 3 hours during the week, it would be required to be made up at another time.</p>
<p>See above</p>	<p><b>UPDATE On Above:</b>          While the suggested idea isn't something that will work for us at the present time, the Insurance Benefits Committee has been discussing other wellness program ideas. They need to know if any or all of them would be ideas that we would be interested in them researching to see if they were an option here at Tech. Some of these ideas are (but not limited to) wellness webinars and workshops, memberships to Tech Fit, Education and Prevention Programs, Weight Management, Onsite Health Screenings, etc. Perhaps we can also do something that kind of ties in with the original idea. We can't offer 3 hours of flex time for wellness but we can start a Wellness Program where you can earn wellness badges (such as your yearly checkups, walking 10,000 steps a day, proof of having a gym membership, etc.). Once you earn a badge, or so many badges, maybe that gets you an extra 8 vacation hours or earns you Wonder Bucks to spend at the cafeteria or books store, and other ideas in the same manner.</p>

**Meeting Adjourned**

At 9:47 am Senator Hilliard made a motion to adjourn, and Senator Tomlin seconded. Vice President Herring concluded the March 7, 2024 meeting.

Respectfully submitted,  
 Whitney Moore, Secretary