

## UT Staff Council General Meeting

### Meeting Minutes September 17, 2020

#### Opening

The general meeting of the UT Staff Council (UTSC) was called to order at 2 p.m. on September 17, 2020 virtually on Zoom by Chair Rainbow Di Benedetto.

ASL interpreters are present and UTSC will continue to provide interpreters for future meetings. Thanks to [Services for Students with Disabilities](#) for offering UTSC this service.

#### Attendance (see pages 9-12)

#### Meeting

##### I. Chair's Report (Rainbow Di Benedetto)

All of the Committees have convened, set meeting times, approved chairs, established priorities, and are getting to work. The attendance at many of the committee meetings has been high and many are breaking into smaller working groups focused on committee goals. There is a lot of enthusiasm and motivation this year. Committee updates will be forthcoming over the next several months.

##### II. Vice Chair's Report (Rhonda Cox)

###### a. Officers' Meetings with Interim-President Hartzell, Associate VP for HR Adrienne Howarth-Moore, and Senior VP/CFO Darrell Bazzell

Meetings with each administrator focused on a number of themes including concerns about football tailgating, off-campus enforcement of masks and social distancing guidelines, and parental leave policy changes that came as a result of the US Department of Labor clarifying the Families First COVID Response Act (FFCRA) which allowed caregivers of children whose schools or daycares have closed the opportunity to have paid time-off. Unless your leave was already approved prior to August 26<sup>th</sup>, caregivers are not allowed to earn this leave if the school or daycare center is partially open and the caregiver has *chosen* to keep children home. Adrienne spoke to us about flexible work options which include flex time, decreased hours, etc. and encouraged staff to speak to their supervisor and HR representative.

##### III. Vote to Approve Minutes (Amy Armstrong)

Quorum was established at the August meeting and representatives approved both the May and June minutes. Motion to vote on August General Meeting minutes was approved. Representatives voted during the meeting using Zoom polls and results will be disseminated once the votes have been tallied and quorum established.

**IV. Speaker: David Darling, Facilities Planning and Management, Associate VP**

During the last meeting, constituents raised questions regarding building safety and what measures have been put in place to make them safe for staff. Darling was part of the Reopen Texas Task Force and was on the Operations Working Group's Readiness Task Force which focused on Facilities Readiness and Campus and Workspace Navigation Task Forces. Using scientific and medical information, two checklists, Facilities Readiness and Workplace Navigation, were created and when those were completed and approved by the Dean/AVP, the building was certified to open. This group also helped with classroom preparation. The process they followed was: discussion with UT researchers and medical leaders, evaluation of scientific and engineering literature, discussion of findings and recommendations with the Executive Committee, and finally implementation of the Plan of Action.

Some of the things learned about COVID-19 transmission, includes the three primary ways of contracting the virus:

1. The leading cause is inhaling or direct contact to eyes, nose or mouth with "droplets;" relatively heavy particles that drop out of the air after traveling a short distance of about 3 to 6 feet.
2. Indirect contact through droplets that contaminate surfaces that are transmitted to eyes, nose or mouth, typically through hands. This method has decreased in importance in the last few weeks and is no longer deemed a primary method of transmission.
3. Inhaled aerosols that are light enough to remain suspended for longer periods and travel longer distances than droplets. This form of transmission has been a concern for many people.

Dr. Michael Klompas from the Journal of the American Medical Association states "The balance of evidence...seems inconsistent with aerosol-based transmission of SARS-CoV-2, particularly in well-ventilated spaces." Current evidence-based science indicates that HVAC air filtration is not a key factor in reducing transmission of the virus.

Based on this guidance, the Plan of Action includes:

- Reduce transmission from the first two sources listed above (inhaling droplets and indirect contact with droplets) by:
  - Reduce density of occupancy
  - Practice social distancing
  - Require protective face masks when indoors

- Practice hand hygiene (3000 hand sanitizing stations have been placed around campus)
- Sanitize high-contact surfaces
- HVAC Plan of Action
  - Maximize fresh air intake in all buildings (This began in April and all through the summer). This is a rather complicated effort.
  - Maintain current filtration levels (this is generally MERV 8 through MERV 10 for common spaces; MERV 13 and higher for spaces that have a medical component)
  - Maintain continuous temperature and humidity control (continue to keep air handlers running; sometimes in a "setback" mode.)
  - Maintain current space pressurization balance

Additional relevant information:

- Baseline testing of 125 classrooms before changes showed average ventilation rates are often multiple times larger than the minimums for 100% occupancy as recommended by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers
- Fresh air intake has been increased as much as possible while still maintaining temperature and humidity control
- Classroom student density is low

For more information on these standards, see [Taylor Engineering COVID-19 whitepaper](#)

Questions from Representatives and Constituents

- Question about restrooms on campus. Has ventilation been improved in all restrooms on campus, have toilets been equipped with lids and instructions to lower lids when flushing, and/or are there other policies in place to make restrooms less risky for transmission? What about the particles that are released through the toilet flume, which can transmit the virus?  
 Restroom ventilation for the majority of instances was not changed and lids have not been installed. Instructions have been communicated through signage to use every other fixture. Decided not to block off every other due to emergency cases. In general, restroom ventilation is much higher than the rest of the spaces because of exhaust fans which creates a ventilation rate that exceeds any office area. Academic efforts to complete sewage affluent testing for COVID-19 and there has been some analysis for this, but Darling hasn't seen any scientific-based evidence that there is aerosolization through toilet flushing, so no major initiatives have been done. There are tens of thousands of toilets on the campus and as more becomes known about this reported source of transmission, appropriate action would be taken.
- Will this presentation be available to download?

The presentation was made available to UTSC. The meeting is recorded.

- Are these same preventive measures being completed to non-UT Austin satellite offices?

Initial implementation was Austin-based and had outreach to MSI and Davis Observatory. Beyond that, the outreach has been through the building managers. We are facilitating access to resources and checklists. We can help with that, but these efforts haven't extended beyond the initial implementation.

- Old buildings have windows that are not able to be opened. Can these be opened?

This is partly a policy question. If a building has operable windows and they function, the climate allows it, and it won't cause damage having windows open, on a fall day [for example], would probably be ok. In general, opening windows is not recommended as it affects the air balance of the building. Check with your building manager.

- What is the occupancy policy for elevators?

A lot of discussion about elevators. They took information they had and the floor area of each elevator and discussed the different scenarios, including mobility issues. They created a matrix and occupancy levels were established. Some of these were modified based on feedback from building managers; mostly downward. A difficulty posed is how to treat a wall in an elevator. The capacity was based on people standing in each corner facing away from each other.

- Has there been any discussion about shared breakrooms and how these should be handled?

Another area of considerable discussion. Everybody needs to have a place to be able to take their masks off in a common space in order to drink and eat. All building managers received guidance and facilitated signage regarding proper etiquette and behavior in the breakroom areas, including disinfecting and cleaning after oneself.

- Offices in the PRC Commons Building doesn't have a working AC unit therefore, this issue doesn't seem like it is in alignment with this presented guidance.

Darling has only been at UT for 9 ½ months, but made a note to check on this building.

- Are custodial and maintenance staff going to be fired for not downloading and using the Protect Texas app; even those who do not have a modern Smartphone? This is what we are being told: comply or your job is at risk.

Darling believes in progressive discipline and understands these are difficult times and a lot of pressure has been put on staff every day. As you said, many staff don't have Smartphones, but they did create a special feature within FAS; a dial-in function and there is an auditory input that provides an email to your supervisor that clears you to come to work. They do periodic audits of the teams to ensure that these

policies are being adhered to and we have implemented a process to get a printed certificate, but have not figured out a centralized way to get those printed and distributed. A soon-to-be-released guidebook for the entire FAS portfolio which requires all employees who are onsite everyday to use the Protect Texas app or the dial-in phone app and that will be audited. The dial-in app is available in Spanish and French, with other languages forthcoming.

- Will the restrooms in buildings be cleaned more frequently (than pre-COVID) once buildings are opened and more staff are in buildings? Over the summer, staff in the custodial field were shifted away from general office cleaning to disinfecting and cleaning high-contact surfaces and restrooms. Buildings are now open and these areas continue to be the priority. Can't guarantee that this level will be able to continue given future budget pressures.
- What is the outlook for summer? There are hundreds of programs that take place over the summer, so what is the outlook for building use? The Executive Committee is still meeting and still getting through the various phases including Spring 2021 before Summer 2021 can be addressed. This virus is difficult to predict, so they are looking to concentrate on getting levels down to sustain the density where we were and then make changes.
- Assumptions about aerosol transmissions were based on a paper that stated this type of risk is low; however, there is other research that says the exact opposite. Why did the committee determine this to be low risk?

Darling has spoken with a researcher with expertise in this field, as well as Dr. Amy Young, and looked at the research himself, and though it is a possibility, there hasn't been a case, yet, to his knowledge, where transmission based on travel to one part of a building from another part of a building through an air conditioning system has occurred. The information is changing. Professor Atila Novoselac, an expert in this field, stated there is less risk spending eight hours on campus than spending 10 minutes at HEB.

**V. Speaker: Susan Harnden, HealthPoint, Director**

Susan gave an update on the [Staff Emergency Fund](#). Staff who have experienced a temporary financial hardship may apply for a grant of up to \$500. The eligibility is listed on the website and includes that you must be employed either full- or part-time by the university for at least six months. The application can be filled out online or printed out, filled out, and faxed or scanned and sent back. Staff is available to help with this process. At the top of the application page is a link to a Spanish version of the webpage and application. Some documentation is required, but they try to minimize that to the extent that they can. The redacted application is given to an anonymous committee and the decision process takes between two and three days. The money can either be direct-deposited or mailed to the recipient. The money in

the fund has grown since COVID-19 due to the President's allocation of funds, UTSC support, and staff and student organizations have donated to the fund, as well as individuals. Staff can donate to the fund through the Hearts of Texas campaign which begins in October. On the allocation form, you will select the UT Foundation Fund, which funds the Staff Emergency Fund, the Student Emergency Fund, and Orange Santa. This fund was not part of the 40 for 40 fundraising campaign this year, but it is something they will look into for the future.

**VI. Speaker: Cindy Posey, Internal Communications, Director**  
**The Power of Internal Communications: How Staff Can Help**

Cindy discussed what Internal Communications does and how they work to enhance communication across campus, and also what staff can do to further that goal. Cindy is very pleased that interim-President Hartzell is very supportive of staff and shared a Texas Connect quote where he acknowledged that staff are integral to UT's recent ranking. University Communications (UC) engages with faculty and staff via Texas Connect, which includes social media and *Texas Connect Magazine* (which you can now get mailed to your home; go to: [utmedia.org/connectathome](http://utmedia.org/connectathome)). The magazine tells the amazing stories of staff and the work we all do and attempts to connect the many silos of the university. UC is also providing Spanish translations of COVID-related websites and Presidential communications, providing new and enhanced "Key Talking Points" for supervisors to share with their staff after these communications are distributed, and will be producing podcasts in the future. Additionally, UC has created stricter email protocols for managing your inbox and several newsletters with important messages, including Health Newsletters (quarterly), UT Camps available for children of faculty and staff (annually), and possibly more to come.

UTSC can help improve internal communications by communicating with our constituents. The UTSC Executive Committee will send constituent emails after every staff council meeting and updating them with news they can use. So, representatives can communicate by holding open houses/happy hours/meet and greets (via Zoom), conducting pulse surveys (a quick survey that address an immediate issue), make sure constituents know how to get in touch with you, and that your "door" is always open. When you do hear from constituents, report back to the UTSC ExComm, contact Cindy and convey that information as well as she is always interested in hearing about staff perceptions, and be sure to let constituents know how issues have been addressed.

Cindy posed questions during the meeting and asked viewers to write their responses in chat. The questions were: Are you getting the communication you need regarding COVID-19? and What can UC do better in general communications?

## Questions from Representatives and Constituents

- The ability to opt-out of emails from the university used to be possible, it doesn't seem to be anymore.  
Most emails should have an unsubscribe to emails link. Official emails from the university probably don't have this feature. Cindy asked the person to send her an email with the specifics of the email so she can investigate.
- How is the university communicating when students test positive?  
The medical staff are responsible for answering this type of question, but the Protect Texas and COVID-19 websites have additional information.
- It is still unclear how we report a staff member who is not following COVID safety requirements.  
Contact the [Behavior Concerns and COVID-19 Advice Line](#) (BCCAL).
- How have you been going about hearing from staff?  
Through the various FAS channels, including HR, leadership of UTSC, and spends a lot of time speaking to employees. Cindy has worked with staff council for about 15 years. She was part of the COVID-19 survey that went out in June. Please feel free to contact [Cindy](#) at any time.
- Comment about the data available on the UT COVID-19 dashboard and how it is less useful than what is provided by Johns Hopkins University.  
Cindy will provide that feedback to the developers.
- According to *The Daily Texan* there have been over 1,000 student cases on campus. What will the threshold be for campus shutdown?  
Cindy stated that needs to be answered by the medical community and isn't something that UC can answer.
- Is there a way to view all of the email subscriptions one is signed up for and the ability to sign up for others?  
Cindy has thought about that and is taking that suggestion back with her.

## VII. Issues Update (Christie Hodge, Issues Committee Chair)

Since the last general meeting, issues have been submitted regarding the COVID-19 Dashboard, whether UT will be participating in payroll tax deferral (an email was sent to employees that stated no), BlueCross BlueShield tele-med visits (coverage is continuing indefinitely), and tailgating (won't be allowed). Some of these issues were resolved on their own and the others were passed on to committee. Clarification was provided on the previously submitted query regarding merit raises for grant-funded positions. There is little flexibility on how grant funding can be spent. Only research staff—not administrative staff—will be eligible for merit raises if it was included in the grant. The reason is it wasn't considered equitable since permanent administrative positions are not eligible for merit raises.

## VIII. Questions from Attendees

- What testing is available at non-Austin admission satellite offices? Some staff are having to pay out-of-pocket and there seems to be inconsistent guidelines depending on where one gets tested. The constituent was asked to send a detailed email of the issues to the Issues Committee, so it could be referred to the appropriate entity.
- Question regarding the Staff Tuition Assistance Program and attending graduate school. UT pays for one course a semester, but requires the staff member to attend in-person, but staff who are working at UT satellites can't attend in-person. The constituent was asked to send a detailed email of the issues to the Issues Committee, so it could be referred to the appropriate entity.
- Question regarding use of the Staff Emergency Fund. There has been a slight uptick over the summer, but not the usage expected. There is money in the fund, so staff are encouraged to apply if they have a need. It is available to furloughed employees, but not to those that have been laid-off, as you must be considered a current employee.

## IX. Adjournment

The October meeting will include an update on the budget and legislative outlook. Binta Brown will be speaking about diversity and inclusion and talent recruitment and retention. Emil Kresl gave information about the UT Reads program which will be reading *The Sword and the Shield* by Dr. Peniel Joseph. UT Learning and Development has raffled 40 books and they are encouraging the formation of small reading groups in CSUs.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:23 p.m. by Rainbow Di Benedetto. The next general meeting will be at 2 p.m. on October 15, 2020, virtually via Zoom.

Minutes submitted by: Amy E. Armstrong, 9 October 2020

Approved by vote on: [xxxx]



## Attendance

District	Elected Representative	9 / 17
102	Hernandez, David Michael	ns
110.1	Magharios, Gina	x
110.2	Ludwick, Cameron M	ns
120.1	Casarez, Adriana	ns
120.2	Rodriguez, Benjamin A	x
130.1	Korves, Elizabeth M	x
130.2	Torrez, Jodi K	x
132	Baker, Teresa M	x
140.1	Armstrong, Amy E	x
140.2	Snyder, Penny Victoria	x
150.1	Toscano, Ashley June	x
150.2	Brown, Ariel Renne	x
150.3	Abrams, Sara J	x
160.1	Hunter, Shanna	ns
160.2	Whetstone, Nicole A	x
161	Busse, Elizabeth D	x
170.1	Garza, Tino	a
170.2	Smuts, Regina A	ns
170.3	Standridge, Angela	x
172	Daugherty, Donna L	x
180.1	Barborka, Jason C	x
180.2	Claiborne, Theresa Marie	x
180.3	Miller, Elizabeth Kay	x
180.4	Knight, Bobby M	x
190.1	Nugent, Michael L	x
190.2	VACANT	v
210.1	Greene, Phoebe A	x
210.2	Huerta, Jason Lee	x
220.1	Carr, Barbara A	x
220.2	Misselhorn, Melissa M	x
230.1	Bowman, Brett Christopher	a
230.2	O'Leary, William Francis	x
230.3	Diaz, Paloma S	x
242	Gandy, Lisa M	x
250.1	King, Jacqueline E	x
250.2	Greenlee, Michael D	x

260.1	VACANT	v
260.2	VACANT	v
260.3	Bradford, Jessica Katheri	x
260.4	VACANT	v
270.1	Blazevich, Laine	x
270.2	Derry, James R	x
270.3	Konieczny, Cory	x
272	VACANT	v
280.1	Martinez, Liliana	x
280.2	Thompson, Dory	x
280.3	Cooks, Stacie Danielle	x
280.4	Rajagopalan, Meera Priya	x
280.5	Wood, Tamara L	x
280.6	Johnson, Harlan C II	x
280.7	Flowers, Kathryn E	x
290.1	Canedo, Yvette Trujillo	x
290.2	Faulk, Cynthia K	x
290.3	Kain, Jessica	ns
290.4	VACANT	v
292	Hartel, Katie	x
302	Cumpton, Greg Belknap	x
310.1	White, Judy S	x
322	Acosta, Ari	x
330.1	Bernier, Sara Jean	x
330.2	Hayes, Julie	ns
330.3	Newman, Christopher	x
340.1	Ruffin, Sylvester L	x
340.2	McKinney, Matthew Wayne	ns
350.1	Bowling, Karen Marie	x
350.2	Duran, Brianna Erin Laube	x
351	VACANT	v
362	Cook-O'Neal, Stephanie An	a
370.1	Zilligen, Eric E	x
370.2	Walker, Michael Lee	x
370.3	Blankenship, Mark Garrett	x
370.4	Charbel, Richard	x
370.5	Zieger, Kenneth A	ns
370.6	Lennon, Lisa	x
370.7	Lee, John Earl	ns
380.1	VACANT	v

380.2	VACANT	v
390.1	Benar, Ross P	ns
390.2	Nguyen, Tiffani	x
390.3	VACANT	v
390.4	Phillips, Weldon H	x
400.1	Atkins, Julia	x
400.2	Capps, Mary C	x
408	Di Benedetto, Rainbow D	x
410.1	Weeda, Don	x
410.2	VACANT	v
412	Matthews, Eda H	x
420.1	VACANT	v
420.2	Lazare, Rob C	ns
420.3	VACANT	v
420.4	Davis, Brian	ns
430.1	Bell, Ronald Eugene II	x
430.2	VACANT	v
430.3	VACANT	v
430.4	Caponigro, Gregory	x
430.5	VACANT	v
430.6	VACANT	v
430.7	VACANT	v
430.8	VACANT	v
441	Tekal, Neelesh V	ns
450.1	Harris, Courtney Elizabet	x
450.2	Cohen-Ford, Rachel Grace	x
450.3	Lawrence, Todd H	x
450.4	Duiker-Walker, Jennifer J	x
450.5	Pearce, Christina	x
460.1	Reyes, Deborah Ann	ns
460.2	Kent, Kelli	x
470.1	Hodge, Christie Lee	x
470.2	Huebsch, Melissa L	x
472	Bedia, Esmer	x
480.1	Barnett, Wesley William	ns
480.2	Buckenmeyer, Susan Elizab	x
999.1	Clifford, Trish Hanna-Eli	ns
999.2	Cox, Rhonda R.	x
999.3	VACANT	v
999.4	Sellers, Ann R.	x

999.5	Sloan, Casey Lauren	x
999.6	Speir, Marcus David	x
999.7	Van Riper, Beth	x

X = Attended

A = Absent with excuse

NS = No Show

W = Attended via Web  
(when in-person meetings  
are held)

V = vacant