

**University Staff Council, A Presidential Committee  
2020-2021 Year End Report**

Submitted by: Michelle Pickham, USC President

The following Final Year End Report highlights the major activities, changes, challenges, and accomplishments of the University Staff Council from July 2020 to June 2021.

**Meetings**

At the beginning of the year in July 2020, the Staff Council continued implementing its weekly staff chat meetings, carried over from the previous months, as a check-in to hear from staff across campus while the University was in a constant state of flux and uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During each weekly chat, the group relayed a summary of the latest COVID Task Force message, highlighting important information for staff awareness and enabling for discussion to clear up any misinterpretations. In August, the weekly chats moved to every other week format as operations around campus prepared for the fall semester. Even after transitioning back to the normal schedule of monthly meetings starting in September, the USC continued to see increased participation this year, regularly having 20-50 individuals, both USC and non-USC members, attending from across campus. Only the December meeting was canceled this year due to the Winter Break.

**Committee Participation and Campus Representation**

The USC continues to be a go-to group for finding staff representation and willing participation in a variety of UMW committees. The Staff Council had representation in the following committees throughout the year:

- President's Council on Wellness – Brittanie Naff
- University Safety Committee – Arin Doerfler
- University Faculty Council – Michelle Pickham (ex officio)
- University Budget Advisory Committee – Michelle Pickham
- President's Leadership Team – Michelle Pickham
- COVID Return to Work Task Force – Charles Tate, Michelle Pickham, Christy Pack
- COVID Implementation Team – Christy Pack
- COVID Care Coordinator – Betsy Southern
- Campus Parking Committee – Charles Tate
- Campus Environment Standing Committee – Michelle Pickham
- Police Community Advisory Panel (CAP) – Arin Doerfler
- Trinkle Hall Renaming Committee – Michelle Pickham, James Pape
- Future of Work Planning Group – Michelle Pickham

The USC worked hard this year to advocate for staff representation in existing University committees. Working closely with the UFC Chair, the USC was able to accomplish adding an extra 4 staff representatives to two different Faculty Councils, the University Budget Advisory Committee, and the James Farmer Multicultural Center Advisory Committee.

Current USC Committee Membership includes:

Arin Doerfler  
Brian Ogle  
Cece Burkett  
Charles Tate  
Christy Pack

Clint Often  
Edward Gray  
Betsy Southern  
James Pape  
Julie Smith

Justin Wilkes  
Kim McManus-Carini  
Lee Roy Johnson  
Maie Makin  
Maria Schultz



Mary Bullock  
Maureen Aylward  
Michael Morley

Michelle Pickham  
Pam Lowery  
Rosemarie Staggs

Ryan Hastings  
Sharon Williams  
Wilma Willard

Arin, Brian, Charles, James, Justin, Michael, and Christy are rolling off of the committee while the members replacing their spots in July 2021 are Rose Maddox, Kyle Smith, Amanda Rutstein, Angie Lunch, Sarah Appleby, Charles Tate (re-elected), and Crystal Rawls. Justin was voted vice president and will be President in July 2021, so an exception was made for him to stay on with adjustments to be made to the 2022 election.

### **Council Goals**

COVID-19 continued to be a challenge for individual sub-committee goals within the Council to be accomplished as staff vacancies, extra tasks and responsibilities, and time available created limitations for our members. However, the USC's overall goals for the year included:

- Working with administration to help them better understand the basis for staff concerns and give more perspective.
- Working more collaboratively with faculty and the UFC to provide a united front on matters of shared concern.
- Continue and increase communication to staff about a variety of matters and information across campus.
- Continue to work on trying to create less disparity between the perceived value of staff versus the faculty.
- Continue to encourage administration to be as transparent as possible about matters across campus.

The Council keeps these goals in mind while continuing to advocate for staff representation, expressing concerns with communication between employees and the administration, and requesting information and transparency.

### **Staff Concerns**

Hearing and addressing staff concerns continued to be a focus of the USC over the last year. The types of concerns ranged widely, but had common focuses around the need for transparency, communication, advocacy for workplace flexibility, the need for acknowledgement, fears of job security, and the recognition of disparity in office environments across the university. It was very apparent from early on that staff were always looking toward the future; not only being reactionary, but also looking forward to what the environment would look like 3-4 months ahead. The feelings commonly shared by staff were that they were constantly looking for guidance from administration, but any guidance always came a little too late.

The Staff Council continues to be active in trying to help resolve and mitigate issues and concerns that come up. A few ways the council has addressed these matters include:

- Bringing concerns directly to appropriate administration and the COVID Implementation Team, with suggestions for resolution if possible, including providing alternate language recommendations for various campus communications and giving staff input on matters.
- Providing specific examples and background to administration to give them a better understanding of staff perspectives for the issues.
- Advocating for appreciation and acknowledgement of all staff.
- Following up on issues to ensure action is taken or the matter is addressed.

### **Staff Council Priorities and Initiatives**

One of the larger initiatives undertaken by the USC over the past year was a list of priorities shared with the President. The list of priorities, titled "Shared Governance. Shared Mission. Priorities and Initiatives to Increase

Staff Welfare and Empowerment and Expand Equity in University Governance.” is attached at the end of this report.

Out of this list, a few items are still ongoing. Updates on the priorities discussed with the president are as follows:

- **Name change:** In February 2021, the University Staff Council underwent a name change from the Staff Advisory Council to the University Staff Council. Staff long perceived that the Council had no real power to make substantial changes at the University because it was seen as only an “advisory” body. And while it’s true that the Council is an advisory body, we felt removing “Advisory” from the name would give it increased legitimacy and a more positive perception to make impact at the University.
- **Staff handbook compilation:** Ongoing. The initial work to gather all policies and information related to staff employment relies heavily on the Human Resources department. The state’s mandated Cardinal project, as well as other competing priorities took precedence for the Human Resources staff. This initiative will continue into 2021-2022.
- **Increased sub-cabinet staff representation:** This remains ongoing. The administration is now aware that the overall desire of the staff is to have more representation from “lower levels” of the staff hierarchy rather than direct cabinet or sub-cabinet individuals to truly be more representative of the general staff body.
- **Existing committee review:** To our knowledge, a holistic review of all existing campus committees has not been done to assess appropriateness, equity, and diversity of representation. This would need to be performed by administration at the cabinet level.
- **Increased encouragement and support for service opportunities:** This remains ongoing. We believe administration sees the importance of supporting service opportunities for staff wherever possible.
- **Attendance of administration to USC meetings:** This will likely be implemented in the 2021-2022 year. Scheduling challenges and sensitive discussion topics necessitated that administration not be present for a majority of the meetings.

### Future of Work

The future of work topic was, and continues to be, one of the most discussed topics among staff.

In early 2021, the USC began discussions with staff about the future of their working environment; getting insights, thoughts, and ideas for what options could be available and scenarios for increased workplace flexibility.

### Staff Awards

We have long recognized that staff recognition is not on par with faculty recognition in a variety of ways, and this topic is discussed a great deal among staff. Whether it is in verbal and written recognition or in assumptions made about how staff and faculty are treated, the disparity is also represented in the official awards available and when/how they are given to these groups (Commencement vs. Staff Luncheon). This hurts staff morale in many ways. To highlight a few differences:

- There are 7 Faculty awards; 3 for Staff
- Faculty awards come with a cash prize each of \$1200 (\$8,400 total); Staff awards include \$250 for the Larry Atkins Award, \$500 for the Charles Coleman Service Award, \$1,200 for the Richard V. and Rosemary A. Hurley Presidential Commendation Award (\$1,950 total)
- There is no BOV-level award for Staff equivalent to the BOV Faculty Leadership Award

The USC made a suggestion at the April BOV meeting for the consideration of a BOV-level Staff Leadership Award.

### Ending Remarks



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The USC is extremely proud of its accomplishments and progress it has made in the last year. It made great strides toward diversity and increased representation, continued to remind the administration that staff input is critical when dealing with campus matters,..... etc.