

## **University Staff Council Meeting Minutes**

Tuesday, February 20, 2024

1:30-3:30 pm

General Services Complex 101 A/ Zoom

### **I. Welcome**

### **II. Common Grounds - Susan Ballabina, Chief of Staff for the President**

- A) PowerPoint Presentation
- B) Common Grounds Recording

### **Get Engaged & Stay Connected:**

- 1) March 22nd: Field Day
- 2) March 23rd: The Big Event
- 3) April 6th - 7th: U.S. Para-Cycling Event
- 4) April 21st: Muster

### **Updates from SEC sub-committees:**

- **Staff Appreciation - Darlene Whyte**
- **Staff Development - Rebecca Spangler**
- **Onboarding - Leann Harris**

### **Questions/Suggestions During Common Grounds**

- A) Luis Gomez : There is a need for Spanish speaking staff members at the South Texas campuses.

### **III. Transition to General Meeting**

### **IV. Call to Order - LaTia Wilson**

**Motion:** Tracy Posey

**Second:** Sarah Franke

### **V. Roll Call of Members - Kat McLelland**

- The Excel file was updated with attendees.

### **VI. Approval of Minutes - January 2024 - Approved @ 2:15PM**

## **VII. Guest Speaker: The Big Event Recruitment Team**

A&M wants to encourage Staff & Faculty members to participate in The Big Event.

PowerPoint Presentation

Volunteer Sign-Ups close February 29th, 2024.

Student groups often serve together - USC could form groups of volunteers.

- A) We will send out an email asking for volunteers.
- B) Share this information with the groups that we represent in order to garner more support.

## **VIII. Treasurer's Report - Tracey Posey**

\$15,000 in USC Engagement Committee.

\$6,742.28 - Regular USC Account.

## **IX. Update from Meeting with Vice President of Human Resources - LaTia Wilson/Marcos Mendez**

Feedback from Work Life & Benefits Committee

- Vacation accrual, leave & employee engagement opportunities.
- Staff Photo Day: Making plans to bring it back in the Fall 2024.
  - Inclusive of Branch Campuses.
- Family Leave Pool is determined by Texas Law.
- How are the limits determined for vacation accrual?
  - Dictated by State Law.
- Is there Staff Appreciation Week?
  - There is not a University wide Staff Appreciation Day/Event but departments are encouraged to celebrate their employees wherever they see fit.
- There is a "Learning Week" for staff members which encourages professional development.
- Absence of a Spring Break for Staff Members.
  - We do have an opportunity to review the staff calendar before they are published.
  - Some Holidays have been added to the calendar such as Memorial Day, Juneteenth & Labor Day.

## **X. USC Staff Inquiries - Marcos Mendez**

- **Two Inquiries**
  - 1) Why is salary compensation not equal among employees within a specific division?
    - Staff members compared salaries to coworkers. USC was able to give them resources to review such as University guidelines and standard operating procedures.
    - USC Executive Officers directed the employees to HR.
  - 2) Why are we (staff) not receiving a Spring Break?

## **USC Speech – Mo. Younes Qatar Representative**

“All great things must come to an end” has never rung truer. The destiny of an entire campus rested in the hands of eight members of the Board of Regents. To Regent Michael Plank, your unwavering belief in our campus and your decisive vote against the proposal is deeply appreciated.

One point that was raised for the decision was it was attributed to the prevailing uncertainty within the region. However, it is noteworthy that the campus opened its operations during a period of conflict, with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Continued its operations during the 2017 embargo on Qatar. Considering these instances, it raises questions about the rationale behind the “uncertainty within the region.” Additionally, there have been mentions that Texas A&M University expressed reservations about maintaining a campus located 8,000 miles away from its main campus in College Station, Texas. This decision also comes after 21 years of being in operation in Qatar and the recent renewal of a 10-year agreement with Qatar Foundation, thus raising concerns regarding the perceived lack of integrity in terminating this agreement prematurely.

TAMUQ has stood as a beacon of excellence in engineering education within our region. Over 1,500 Aggies have proudly worn their Aggie rings, embarking on illustrious careers, or pursuing advanced degrees across esteemed institutions worldwide. However, with the decision to possibly not admit any new incoming classes, this opportunity is tragically severed for many prospective students. The current cohorts may stand as the final graduates of our esteemed institution.

Is there such a thing as a flawless workplace? Let's be candid: perfection eludes us all. Yet, TAMUQ epitomized an environment as close to perfection as one could hope. Like many others, I arrived in Qatar with the expectation of a brief tenure, only to find a lasting home over the past decade. Some colleagues have dedicated even longer tenures, shaping the university since its inception in 2003.

Presently, uncertainty looms over the Qatar campus. The announcement of closure in 2028 has left us in limbo. As a transition team convenes to chart the path forward, not exactly the path forward we saw coming, however one definite need echoes: transparency, communication, and open dialogue between leadership and staff. The Board of Regents' decision came as a shock to us, underscoring the urgent need for inclusive decision-making processes.

Our recent Town Hall meeting with President Welsh, Provost Alan Sams, and Vice Provost N.K Anand, fell short of addressing our concerns. A mere 30 minutes, devoid of meaningful dialogue, was insufficient given the magnitude of the announcement. Once again, transparency and communication must underpin all interactions between leadership and staff as we navigate this uncertain future.

Representing the Qatar campus within the USC has been an enriching experience. Amidst the challenges, I have encountered remarkable individuals dedicated to effecting positive change. I plead for you all to call for transparency and open dialogue, ensuring your voices resonate in the corridors of power. With that being said, it's unfortunate “all great things must come to an end!”

**Thank you, and Gig' Em!**

## **XI. Qatar Campus Update- Mo Younes**

- **The Qatar campus was very shocked to hear that the campus is closing in 2028.**
- **Webinar was held but they could not see the employees and it only lasted 30 minutes.**
- The destiny of the campus was held in 8 hands - BOR. Why was this decision made?
  - The campus opened in 2003 despite the war in Afghanistan & Iraq.
  - The campus continued operations through the 2017 embargo on Qatar.
  - There were concerns regarding maintaining a campus 8,000 miles away from College Station.

Sarah Franke: "Thank you Mo for your advocacy and service to Staff & Qatar."

- The University Staff council stands with the staff in Qatar.
- A&M is planning to send counseling & professional resources to the staff in Qatar.

How can USC better support the staff in Qatar?

## **XII. USC Committee Updates**

### **1. Branch Committee**

- Will continue to advocate for Qatar. Date for the 5k
- Upcoming 5k for Staff Emergency Fund.
  - Interest across the remote campuses to participate.
  - Some of the campuses will be hosting their own 5k while others will participate virtually.
- CERW (Clint Patterson) - How can we engage remote campuses?
- Lesley Swanson
  - Strategic Summit - Strategic planning for the campus.
  - Data will be available within Google Drive.
    - Disconnect between employees on remote campuses while the supervisor is in College Station.
- Galveston Quick-Look Assessment has been posted by President Welsh and his team.
  - TAMUG will be a new College unit.
  - Inquiry from remote campuses regarding Staff Appreciation day - encouraged but not held at the University level.
- USC representative relationship with leadership.
  - Ask to sit with the Executive Teams.

### **2. Communications and Outreach**

- 5k - Will be named "Maroon & White Fun Run." - allows for shorter/longer distances.
  - Routes for Branch Campuses will be provided.
- Donations & Volunteers are needed for the 5k.
  - There will be a link sent out for volunteer sign-ups.
- USC Newsletter → Need information from the groups that are represented.

- As representatives attend meetings, send the information to communications & outreach regarding the progress being made.

### **3. Community Engagement and Respect in the Workplace (CERW)**

- Still moving forward with the big vision.
- Recognize core values, unique staff experiences & branch campuses.
- Pushing event back to the summer.
- Look for CommUNITY.
  - What does community look like?
- How can we recognize the staff and teams across campuses? Rubric will be created.

### **4. Elections**

- Moving towards our election cycle.
- There will be a meeting with the election coordinators at the GSC next week.
  - A remote option will be available.
- An orientation will be held to explain what the process is & how elections will move forward.
- The committee is putting together a guide for members who come in between orientations.
- The School of Business is sending a new member. They will be the first to use the new guide and to provide feedback.

### **5. Professional Development (PD)**

- Met on Feb 13, 2024
- Brainstorming session (Committee Members & Executive Officers) will be held.
  - What do you want as a mentor or as a mentee during the Staff Mentorship Academy?
  - Will ask USC members to go through as a pilot program.
- Employee Evaluations - 2025 may be reevaluated.
- Common Grounds is booked through August 2024.
- Employee Learning week content will be available through the end of the year.
  - December 1st through 8th.
  - 448 employees were impacted.
- Employee Learning Day - June 2024.
  - Rising Strong, Resiliency, Change Readiness.

### **6. Staff Emergency Fund (SEF)**

- Jan 31, 2024
- The current balance is \$408.
- \$10,000 in additional funding was approved by President Welsh.

### **7. Work Life and Benefits (WLB)**

- Not all plans fall under the Verizon benefit plan. The employee will need to go online to the Verizon website (<https://www.verizon.com/discounts>) and inquire about whether or not the

plan that the employee has qualifies for a TAMU discount.

- Resources
  - Family Leave Pool.
    - Regulated by the System Office.
  - Certain activities do not require you to use your sick leave or annual leave. Reminder as a benefit TAMU provides “other paid leave” to its employees under **System Regulations 31.03.03 Leaves of Absence with Pay** - <https://policies.tamus.edu/31-03-03.pdf> for various other activities such as organ, bone marrow or blood donors without having to use their vacation, sick leave or compensatory time accruals. This also includes voting during election time.
  - “Blue Points”
    - Reminder of a resource TAMU employees could utilize is the Blue Points with BlueCross BlueShield by participating activities. The web link to the PDF for more information is [https://employees.tamu.edu/benefits/\\_media/documents/bluepointsprogram.pdf](https://employees.tamu.edu/benefits/_media/documents/bluepointsprogram.pdf)
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### **XIII. External Committee Appointments**

#### **A. System Employee Benefits Advisory Committee - Rebecca Luckey**

- a. Met today (02/20/24) from 9AM to Noon. They will be evaluating benefits that are offered. Potentially gaining new coverage.
- b. The System Office will be sending out emails soon (March - June) regarding benefits.
- c. Prescription drugs - Express Scripts - If you experience issues with Express Scripts send in an email to the USC inquiry email address so that the committee can review real life examples.
- d. Delta Dental Benefits - Delta Dental is not covering certain charges and/or not accepting insurance.
  - i. Dentists do not need to take insurance.
  - ii. Resorting to self-pay.
- e. FSA accounts will be accepted at some locations.
  - i. Reach out to your doctor/specialist/dentist to ask what they accept.

- ii. If you are paying cash up front, you will need the **code** from the doctor's office if you want to be reimbursed.

**B. Transportation Services Advisory Committee - Jamie Norgaard/Katelynn Kellogg**

- a. Increase in Spring Semester ridership (Bus).
- b. Permits were up 3% but revenue was down 3%.
  - i. Pay by hour parking is down.
- c. Paratransit is currently in the process of transitioning ride service to an Uber-like app for better efficiency and user experience. More details to come soon.
- d. Bush/Wellborn intersection construction
  - i. How to mitigate traffic when the intersection closes completely?

**C. Dining Services Committee - Tracey Posey**

- a. Met February 6th.
- b. "Dine on Campus" mobile app and website. Order ahead of time, know what they are serving & hours of operation.
- c. "Teaching Kitchen" - Open to all of the campus community.

**D. TAMU IT Governance Program - Jeff Lowry/Shelly Drgac/Sally Yang**

- a. Met on February 8th. Appointed a new Secretary.
- b. Narrow the scope of AI to generative AI.
- c. Reach out to an expert regarding campus surveys on Chat GPT.

**E. Strategic Budget Council-LaTia Wilson**

- a. Planning process for next fiscal year's budget to be more inclusive of everyone affected.
- b. Phase 1 of the process is underway. - Listening to Budget Requests for FY25.

**F. Capacity and Student Experience Study Committees - Catherine Halverson/Kenric Davies**

- a. Met on Jan 31, 2024

b. Capacity Committee - Leaning towards student experience.

**G. Chief Compliance Officer Selection Committee - Wendy Wright**

**H. HROE Advisory Council - Marcos Mendez**

**I. Chief Operating Officer Selection Committee**

#### **XIV. Additional Reports**

**A. Google Storage Project**

a. Attended February EO/Committee Chairs meeting; addressed changes to storage limits

**B. Faculty Senate Personnel and Welfare Committee**

a. USC rep attending February 26 meeting

**C. Student Research Week**

a. The Student Research Week executive team is looking for faculty and staff members to assist with judging presentations March 18-22, 2024.

b. Faculty and staff who are interested in judging at the largest student-run research symposium in the nation can register by March 1

**D. Staff Mentorship Academy**

a. Meeting to discuss March 4

#### **XV. Adjournment**

**Motion: Nicole Aguilar**

**Second: Sarah Franke**

**Next meeting: March 19, 2024, in General Services Complex, 101 B/C from 8:45-10:45 am**