

Staff Senate Monthly Meeting

January 9, 2025, at 3:00 p.m.
Main Campus Student Center Room 249
In-person attendance for Staff Senators and Alternates
Virtual attendance available through [livestream link](#)

Meeting Minutes

Call to Order

Crystal Hildenbrand, Staff Senate Chair

Chair Hildenbrand called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. She shared meeting best practices with staff, guests, and those who attended virtually and welcomed the new senators who will serve during the 2024-2025 year. Speaking is limited to senators, alternates, ex-officio members, and individuals who have been granted speaking privileges before the meeting. Senators should state their name and their division before speaking. Non-senators who wish to speak at future meetings can notify Staff Senate by emailing staffsenate@ecu.edu.

Roll Call

Jenna Boardman, Staff Senate Secretary

A roll call was conducted to determine if a quorum was present.

Approval of Minutes

Jenna Boardman, Staff Senate Secretary

The December 12, 2024, meeting minutes were emailed to Staff Senate members. One correction was received, and the minutes were approved as amended.

Treasurer's Report

Jennifer Jones, Staff Senate Treasurer

Treasurer Jones provided a financial update, noting one adjustment in the discretionary funds balance due to an additional transaction.

The beginning balance for state funds was \$9,827.17, and the ending balance was \$9,249.01. The only expenses deducted were the two chair stipends for the December payrolls and a room reservation.

There were no changes regarding state funds for the UNC Staff Assembly. Expenses from the November meeting were reimbursed on January 3rd, so they will be reflected in next month's report.

The beginning balance for discretionary funds was \$37,398.08, and the ending balance was \$34,631.13. December expenses included the annual Canva subscription and the polos and nametag order from Action Advertising. Additionally, an administrative fee of 2% of the balance at the time, which amounted to \$699.92, was charged to this fund.

There were no changes to any of the scholarship funds.

No further questions were raised regarding the Treasurer's Report.

Student Success Climate

Dr. Allen Guidry, Associate Provost for Learner Operations

Chris Stansbury, Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

Dr. Allen Guidry, Associate Provost for Learner Operations, and Chris Stansbury, Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, provided an update on student success initiatives at ECU. They discussed efforts within enrollment and student success, framing the conversation around key challenges, or "headwinds," that the university faces.

The presentation emphasized student success as a critical institutional priority, not only as part of ECU's mission but also due to its financial and operational implications. The speakers highlighted the enrollment cliff, a demographic trend impacting student numbers nationwide. North Carolina, in particular, is projected to experience a steady decline in high school graduates over the next decade, affecting university enrollment and funding.

ECU's funding model is based on student credit hour generation and performance metrics, including graduation rates and undergraduate degree efficiency. The drop in enrollment in 2022 has already impacted funding, underscoring the need for proactive measures to retain and graduate students efficiently.

To address these challenges, ECU has focused on enhancing the student experience, particularly in onboarding processes and orientation, and removing administrative barriers. The university has identified opportunities to improve retention by examining policies that hinder student success, such as restrictive account holds. The Barrier Reduction Team meets regularly to assess and eliminate unnecessary obstacles preventing students from progressing.

A key takeaway from the discussion was the importance of personal connection in recruitment and retention. Data shows that students who visit ECU's campus are 26% more likely to enroll. Additionally, students who feel a strong sense of belonging and personal support are more likely to persist through graduation. ECU is committed to improving its student services, ensuring that students receive direct and helpful responses when they seek assistance rather than being redirected through multiple offices.

One specific initiative aimed at supporting incoming students is the First-Year CARES program, which connects students experiencing anxiety, stress, or other challenges with campus resources before they arrive. Launched initially through grant funding, this program has demonstrated a significant impact, leading to permanent institutional support.

Beyond academic and administrative improvements, ECU is also focused on the well-being of all students. This includes an integrated approach that connects counseling, student health, and campus recreation into a cohesive support system. The goal is to create a comprehensive, student-centered model that ensures success from admission through graduation.

The presentation concluded with an invitation for faculty and staff across all departments to see themselves as part of ECU's student success ecosystem. Regardless of their role, every staff and faculty member can positively impact students through small but meaningful interactions.

Following the presentation, a question was raised regarding ECU's commitment to environmental sustainability and whether this could be better promoted to prospective students. The Princeton Review has consistently found that 70% of prospective students consider environmental stewardship a factor in their college decision. Given this, ways were discussed to better highlight ECU's sustainability efforts in student recruitment materials, campus events, and communications.

Dr. Guidry and Mr. Stansbury welcomed this feedback and agreed that sustainability messaging should be integrated into ECU's outreach efforts, including events like Pirates in Your Town and Admitted Students Day. Additionally, they acknowledged the need to enhance communication strategies to ensure students are fully aware of the university's strengths and commitments, including sustainability initiatives.

The session ended with a reminder that student success is a collective responsibility and that ECU is working toward a one-ECU approach—breaking down silos, improving cross-departmental collaboration, and ensuring all students feel supported throughout their time at the university.

Student Success Conference

Dr. Dennis McCunney, Associate Director, Center for Student Success

Dr. Dennis McCunney from the Center for Student Excellence and Student Success provided an overview of the upcoming 12th Annual Student Success Conference, scheduled for January 31st. The event aims to foster collaboration across ECU by bringing together faculty, staff, and administrators to discuss strategies for supporting student achievement.

The conference will run from 8:30 AM (registration) to just after 2:00 PM. It will feature a keynote speaker and 15 breakout sessions covering various aspects of student success. A major theme this year is Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education, including its impact on student engagement, learning, and critical thinking.

The keynote speaker, Mark Roman, has extensive experience in educational technology. He has served as Chief Information Officer (CIO) at multiple universities and as a board member for Edge of Cause, a leading EdTech organization. His presentation will highlight current AI trends, ethical considerations, and how AI shapes higher education.

Breakout sessions will cover various topics, focusing on how AI is transforming student learning and faculty interactions. Dr. McCunney encouraged faculty and staff, regardless of their familiarity with AI, to attend and engage in these meaningful discussions. The goal is to ask critical questions rather than simply accepting AI as an unavoidable trend, including ethical concerns and its role in fostering or hindering critical thinking skills.

Dr. McCunney emphasized that professional development opportunities like this conference are limited, making it an essential event for ECU employees across all divisions. With a goal of 200 registrants, attendance is approaching capacity, and he encouraged further participation.

Conference Details & Registration:

Date: January 31st

Time: 8:30 AM - 2:00 PM

Location: ECU Campus

Cost: \$85 (includes breakfast, lunch, and materials)

Registration: Available online—search "ECU Student Success Conference" to find the registration page.

Dr. McCunney closed by inviting questions and reiterating that the conference serves as a springboard for future collaboration in student success efforts at ECU. He hopes to see broad participation on the 31st and emphasized the importance of this ongoing dialogue in shaping the university's approach to student achievement.

Black Student Success Summit

Aisha Powell, Assistant Director, College of Business Advising Center

Aisha Powell and Vanessa Boateng presented on the upcoming Black Student Success Summit, an event organized by the Black Student Union and the Black Student Success Planning Committee. Now in its third year, the summit aims to foster a sense of belonging, provide student success strategies, and build leadership skills for ECU students. The event is a student-led initiative, with planning committee members taking ownership of ECU's strategic goals for student success.

The Communications and Marketing Chair, Vanessa Boateng, highlighted the summit's impact on the ECU community. The event is designed to equip students with academic and professional success strategies, develop leadership skills that benefit communities in North Carolina and beyond, and strengthen relationships between Black students, faculty, staff, alumni, and allies. These connections offer students a valuable support system that extends beyond their time at ECU.

This year's keynote speaker is ECU alumnus Greg Hedgepeth, who brings extensive experience in leadership and professional development. His address will align with the summit's theme, "Navigating Success: Empowering Black Students for Global Impacts," which emphasizes the importance of preparing students for local and global success. The summit has seen significant engagement in past years, with over 450 attendees, making it one of the most anticipated student success events on campus.

Faculty and staff are encouraged to support the summit by promoting the event through social media, registering to attend, and volunteering to assist with logistics. QR codes were provided to facilitate easy access to registration, volunteer sign-ups, and promotional materials. Despite some technical difficulties with the video presentation, the speakers reiterated the summit's significance in shaping student experiences at ECU. By attending and supporting this initiative, faculty, staff, and the broader ECU community can empower Black students and enhance student success on campus.

Committee Updates

Executive Committee

Bri Wood provided a brief update, beginning with a reminder that everyone should have received an email from POSO and Toya regarding upcoming workshops focused on career development and team learning. These workshops are part of the Pirate Readiness Enhancement Program and will occur throughout January. The scheduled sessions include Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace on Wednesday, January 22nd, Introduction to Performance Management and Employee Development on Friday, January 24th, Teamwork Dynamics for Supervisors on Wednesday, January 29th, and Leadership as Mediation: Managing Relationships and Conflict in the Office on Friday, January 31st. Each session runs virtually from 10:30 AM to 12:00 PM, and participants can register through Cornerstone by searching for the Pirate Readiness Enhancement Program and selecting their desired session.

Additionally, employees should have received an email regarding the required Cornerstone training, which must be completed by March 9th. This training, "When Lightning Strikes: How to Recognize and Respond to an Extreme Violence Event," is an essential safety initiative. Staff members must complete the training on time to ensure campus-wide preparedness.

By-Laws Committee

Committee Chair Lauren Arp provided a brief update on the work of the Bylaws Committee and offered to assist with researching bylaws from other UNC system schools as part of the Committee Revision Task Force. This research will help inform potential revisions and ensure alignment with best practices across the system.

Communication and Marketing Committee

No report.

Human Resources Committee

In Senator Smith's absence, an update was provided regarding staff emeritus nominations. The committee received 14 nominations and is currently reviewing the nomination packets in preparation for the selection process.

Following this, Lee Ann Goff from POSO Benefits gave a presentation on the new Bereavement Leave Policy, which was recently announced via email. The policy is designed to support employees during times of personal loss by allowing eligible staff to take leave for the death of an immediate family member or a colleague. Permanent employees working at least 50% time qualify for this leave, with part-time employees receiving a pro-rated amount based on their scheduled hours.

The policy generously defines immediate family members, including grandparents and siblings, who were previously not covered under bereavement leave. For colleagues, employees may take leave if the deceased was someone they worked with within the past two years, even if that individual had since left ECU. There is a four-day window in which bereavement leave can be used for a colleague's passing.

Employees requesting bereavement leave must submit minimal documentation, such as an obituary, a funeral program, or other memorial service details. The request form, included in the recent email announcement, is also available on the HR website under forms. Supervisors must approve requests to ensure departmental awareness. Employees are encouraged to submit documentation at the time of request, but if it is not immediately available, HR will work with them to complete the process.

The new bereavement leave is retroactive to September 27, 2024, meaning employees who experienced a qualifying loss after that date may still apply for leave. HR will work with affected employees and departments to adjust any previously used vacation or sick leave.

Employees may take up to 40 hours for immediate family members within 180 days of the loss, which can be used continuously or intermittently. However, intermittent leave must be scheduled in coordination with the department to avoid operational disruptions.

Employees are encouraged to review the policy details, request form, and FAQs provided in the recent email. Any questions or concerns can be directed to the HR benefits team, who will assist with specific situations and ensure the policy is applied correctly. Goff emphasized that this new policy benefits employees, and HR is committed to helping staff navigate the process effectively.

Leadership and Professional Development Committee

Joani Zary provided an update from the Leadership & Professional Development Committee, which held its most recent meeting on December 16th via Teams. During the meeting, committee members confirmed that the first Career Readiness Presentation will be titled "The Whole U." This session provides a comprehensive perspective on professional growth and career preparedness. The tentative date for this event is April 14th, pending final confirmation. The exact time is still to be determined, as scheduling depends on speaker availability and coordination with Rob's team.

Additionally, the committee discussed plans for an end-of-April event scheduled for Monday, April 28th. While the topic and speaker are still being finalized, the session is expected to occur at 2:00 PM or 3:00 PM, pending confirmation.

Once the details for both events are finalized, we will share further updates. The committee continues to work on providing meaningful professional development opportunities for ECU staff.

Membership Committee

Senator Anthony Bechtel provided a quick update. The committee is reviewing nominations, and elections will take place soon.

Recognition and Rewards Committee

Dana Lopez provided an update from the Recognition & Rewards Committee, announcing that nominations for the Outstanding Staff Awards will open next Monday. An email will be sent out with details on the nomination process and where to submit entries. The award recipients will be recognized on May 1st at a ceremony in the Black Box Theater.

The committee is also reviewing the Pirate Perks program, focusing on refining available discounts. The goal is to prioritize local and regional discounts, ensuring staff access to more relevant and impactful perks. The committee is working to remove excessive or less practical offers, such as minor discounts on neon signs, in favor of more valuable benefits, including theme park discounts and ticket deals for attractions that better serve ECU employees.

Further updates will be provided as the committee finalizes these changes.

Scholarship Committee

Jenny Gregory provided an update from the Scholarship Committee, announcing that the fund agreement has been updated to officially reflect the name "Children of Staff Scholarship." This update ensures clarity in the scholarship's purpose and eligibility.

The committee is also actively working on the silent auction and is currently seeking donations to support the fundraiser. Contributions from staff and the ECU community are encouraged to help make the event a success. As the event approaches, more details on donation procedures and auction logistics will be shared.

Well-Being Committee

Summer Edwards provided an update from the Well-Being Committee, noting that planning is underway for the upcoming Women Leaders Panel. While the panelists are still being finalized, the event is scheduled for March 6th. Further details, including the list of speakers and event logistics, will be shared once they are confirmed.

Old Business

Crystal Hildenbrand, Staff Senate Chair

Update from Committee Realignment Taskforce

Secretary Boardman provided an update from the Committee Realignment Taskforce, expressing gratitude to those who volunteered to serve. While the task force has not yet fully kicked off, she assured members that the necessary information would be sent out soon. A Doodle poll will be shared to schedule the next meeting, allowing participants time to review the feedback from the survey before discussions begin.

One key area of focus for the task force is examining committee structures from other Staff Senates across the state to help guide realignment efforts. As the task force progresses, more detailed updates will be provided at the next meeting.

New Business

Crystal Hildenbrand, Staff Senate Chair

Announcements

Crystal Hildenbrand, Staff Senate Chair

In closing, Chair Crystal Hildenbrand announced that the next Staff Senate meeting will be held on Thursday, February 13th, 2025, at 3:00 p.m. in the Auditorium at East Carolina Heart Institute.

The meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

Meeting minutes were taken and prepared by Staff Senate Secretary Jenna Boardman.