

Staff Senate Monthly Meeting

February 13, 2025, at 3:00 p.m.
East Carolina Heart Institute Auditorium
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 January 9, 2025, meeting minutes were emailed to Staff Senate members. No corrections were received, and the minutes were approved as presented.

Campus Update

Stephanie Coleman, Vice Chancellor for Administration & Finance

Vice Chancellor Stephanie Coleman provided an update on recent university achievements, ongoing initiatives, and upcoming events.

University Awards and Recognitions: In Fall 2024, ECU received multiple awards, including the designation as an Innovative and Economic Prosperity University for another five-year period. The university also received the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Community Engagement Scholarship Award, making ECU a finalist for the C. Peter McGrath Community Engagement Scholarship Award. Competing against the University of Minnesota, Oregon State, and West Virginia University, ECU emerged as the winner—marking the second time ECU has received this prestigious national recognition.

Additionally, Master Officer Frannie Tarkington was recognized with the UNC System Officer of the Year Award for her dedication to supporting individuals navigating physical, mental, and emotional trauma related to sexual assault. She was also honored by ECU's Board of Trustees at their November meeting.

Campus Developments: ECU held the groundbreaking ceremony for the Center for Medical Education in November. Construction is scheduled to begin in March. As construction progresses, parking availability in the affected area will change.

The university also celebrated its first Project Kitty Hawk graduate at the December commencement ceremony, officially becoming the first institution in North Carolina to do so.

Athletic Achievements: ECU's women's soccer team won the AAC Championship, and the volleyball team achieved its highest program finish in the conference. The football team ended the year on a high note with a victory over NC State in the Military Bowl.

Strategic Enrollment and Funding Updates: Enrollment strategies and student success remain key priorities impacting university funding. The state's budget revenue is tightening due to financial commitments in Western North Carolina for recovery efforts following Hurricane Helene. ECU submitted a North Carolina Talent Scholarship funding request, proposing a matching fund initiative where the university raises a certain amount and the state provides matching funds. The university hopes this proposal gains traction in the legislature.

Additionally, ECU is advocating for permanent adjustments to the UNC System funding model, which currently includes both recurring and non-recurring components. Non-recurring funding, often used for one-time expenses like equipment, limits the university's ability to make long-term investments in personnel and operations. ECU and other UNC institutions will push for a fully recurring funding model in the upcoming legislative session.

R1 Research Designation: ECU achieved R1 status under the Carnegie Classification system, the highest designation for research universities. This milestone enhances ECU's ability to secure competitive research funding, support student research opportunities, and increase national recognition. A website has been created to provide information about the designation, and the university will celebrate this achievement throughout the coming months.

Fiscal Health Initiative: The Fiscal Health Project, launched in Fall 2024, continues into the Spring 2025 semester. Updates were shared in a December campus forum, and the oversight committee has prioritized key recommendations for implementation. Some initiatives will require long-term planning, while others will see immediate action. Updates will be posted on the project website, and efforts are being made to enhance website navigation for improved accessibility.

An IT Organizational Assessment campus forum was held on February 11, 2025. A proposed IT service model was presented, and a follow-up survey was launched. Employees are encouraged to review the recording, access the presentation, and provide feedback through the Fiscal Health website.

Operational and Administrative Enhancements: ECU is exploring opportunities to reimagine shared services for administrative functions such as travel processing and HR actions. Many offices currently operate with only one staff member handling key administrative tasks, creating challenges with workload management and continuity. The goal is to develop a model that improves efficiency and support for employees while maintaining high service standards.

Upcoming Events:

Pirate Aboard – Scheduled for March 29, 2025, this recruitment event aims to attract prospective students. Faculty, staff, and community members are encouraged to extend a warm welcome to visitors and showcase ECU’s strong campus spirit.

Spring Commencement – Scheduled for May 9, 2025, at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium. This event marks an important milestone in students’ academic journeys as they graduate and transition into their professional careers.

Vice Chancellor Coleman closed by expressing appreciation for the contributions of ECU staff in advancing the university’s mission. She emphasized the importance of staff engagement and support in achieving institutional goals and welcomed any questions from attendees.

Chancellor’s Scholars Initiative & Pirate Nation Gives

Christopher Dyba, Vice Chancellor for University Advancement

Vice Chancellor for University Advancement, Christopher Dyba, provided an update on the Chancellor Scholars Initiative and Pirate Nation Gives. He began by emphasizing the role of University Advancement in student success, reinforcing that recruitment and retention are collective efforts across campus. He highlighted the importance of creating a welcoming environment, including small gestures like assisting visitors on campus.

Dyba explained the need for general recruitment scholarships at ECU. While the university has many discipline-based scholarships for specific majors, there is a lack of general scholarships that can attract high-achieving students, regardless of their intended field of study. The Chancellor Scholars Initiative addresses this gap by offering a \$2,500 per year renewable scholarship for four years to undergraduate students who meet GPA and academic requirements. This initiative not only attracts students to ECU but also incentivizes them to graduate on time, benefiting both the students and the university’s retention and graduation metrics. The goal is to fund 300 of these scholarships, with 75 new awards each year. To sustain the program, the university is actively raising both annual funds and long-term endowments, leveraging potential state matching funds to accelerate growth.

Dyba then discussed Pirate Nation Gives (PNG), ECU's annual day of giving, which takes place in March. Unlike the national "Giving Tuesday," which follows Thanksgiving and is highly competitive, ECU strategically moved its giving day to align with Founders Day and other university milestones. PNG has become a major philanthropic event featuring donor challenges, student participation, social media campaigns, and gamified fundraising efforts. Last year, ECU raised \$8.5 million from approximately 3,000 donors, and this year's goal is to surpass that amount. Planning for PNG is a year-long effort involving extensive outreach to donors and campus partners.

Dyba concluded by thanking the Staff Senate for its continued support of student scholarships, acknowledging both individual and collective contributions. He reiterated that supporting student scholarships aligns directly with ECU's mission and helps strengthen the university's financial health. He then invited questions before concluding his remarks.

ECU Health Update

Dr. Jason Higginson, Executive Dean, BSOM, Chief Health Officer, ECU Health

Dr. Jason Higginson provided an update on the formation of ECU Health, its implications for ECU employees, and the broader impact on the medical school and healthcare in eastern North Carolina.

Dr. Higginson began by providing historical context on the founding of the Brody School of Medicine. When the school was established, it partnered with Pitt County Memorial Hospital, which had an open medical staff that included private practices. The agreement ensured that the private practice community would continue to play a role in educating medical students. Over time, both the school and the hospital have evolved significantly. However, one of the longstanding challenges has been the lack of strategic alignment between the university's medical school and the hospital system.

The formation of ECU Health represents a step toward a more integrated academic medical center, aligning the university's education and research functions with a patient care delivery system. Prior to ECU Health's formation, there was a significant divide between the two entities, leading to inefficiencies in resource utilization and strategic decision-making. Chancellor Rogers and the ECU Health Board worked together to establish a Joint Operating Agreement to improve collaboration between ECU and ECU Health. Under this agreement, both entities remain separate organizations with distinct tax IDs, but they now share governance through a Joint Operating Committee, which includes the ECU Chancellor, a university trustee, and a board member from ECU Health.

Dr. Higginson emphasized that the missions of both organizations are closely aligned. ECU Health aims to improve the health and well-being of eastern North Carolina. At the same time, the medical school focuses on educating future doctors, increasing access for students from rural areas, and supplying primary care physicians to underserved communities. ECU continues to be highly rated by U.S. News & World Report for its contributions to primary care and for graduating students with low debt burdens, allowing them to practice in rural areas without financial pressure to pursue more lucrative specialties.

Admissions at the Brody School of Medicine remain highly competitive. For the 100 available seats, the school received over 1,700 applications, with incoming students scoring in the 75th percentile on the MCAT. Approximately 50% of graduates stay in North Carolina, particularly in eastern areas, to practice primary care. The residency program has also seen growth, with 20% of ECU's own graduates staying for residency—double the previous percentage before ECU Health was formed. Additionally, ECU Health is now the largest physician practice in eastern North Carolina, growing from two separate practices of about 300 doctors each to approximately 900 physicians today. This consolidation has helped recruit and retain medical specialists that previously were not available in the region.

Financially, the healthcare industry remains challenging, but ECU Health has found efficiencies by combining medical specialties such as neurology, cardiology, and infectious disease. This reduces redundancy and improves patient care. Dr. Higginson highlighted pediatric ophthalmology as an example of successful recruitment under the new model. Historically, ECU struggled to attract specialists in this field, but under the ECU Health structure, the university was able to recruit a Duke-trained pediatric ophthalmologist, significantly enhancing NICU care.

Looking ahead, Dr. Higginson discussed several key developments:

New Medical Education Building: Construction is underway, thanks in part to ECU Health's support. A webpage has been created to update parking and access as the project progresses. Once completed, this facility will enable ECU to increase its medical school class size from 86 to 120 students per year.

National Research Changes: With recent leadership changes at the NIH, ECU is closely monitoring potential impacts on its R1 research designation and funding opportunities. Brody plays a major role in ECU's research infrastructure, so maintaining strong research output remains a priority.

Medical School Accreditation: ECU is preparing for its 2027-2028 accreditation review, which will involve faculty, staff, and university leadership.

Dr. Higginson also acknowledged ongoing challenges related to the integration of ECU and ECU Health, particularly for employees navigating different policies and organizational structures. He noted that efforts are underway to align policies for ECU and ECU Health staff who work side by side, improve shared services, and streamline IT support. While progress has been made, fully integrating the organizations may take another two years.

In response to audience questions, Dr. Higginson addressed concerns about staff confusion regarding employment classifications between ECU and ECU Health. He acknowledged that policy misalignment has been a major frustration, and efforts are ongoing to ensure consistency in HR policies, benefits, and IT services. He emphasized that while ECU Health and ECU remain separate entities for legal and financial reasons, the goal is for employees to experience a unified system rather than stark differences between the two. Additionally, he highlighted the state's NC Cares initiative, which encourages partnerships between ECU and institutions like UNC-Chapel Hill to improve healthcare access in rural North Carolina.

Dr. Higginson concluded by reaffirming that ECU Health is stronger than ever, both in terms of patient care and medical education. The partnership allows ECU to expand its class sizes, recruit top-tier faculty, and provide better healthcare services to the region. He thanked the Staff Senate for the opportunity to speak and welcomed additional questions.

Student Government Update

Rushil Sachania, SGA Attorney General

SGA Attorney General Rushil Sachania updated recent Student Government Association activities and initiatives.

He began by celebrating ECU's victory over NC State in the Military Bowl, which allowed ECU to reclaim the Victory Barrel, a long-standing tradition between the two schools. ECU had not possessed the barrel since 2016. To commemorate the victory, ECU will add plates for its 2016 and 2024 wins, while NC State will add plates for its 2018, 2019, and 2022 victories. More information on the tradition can be found on the SGA website.

SGA also introduced a new campus tradition with the installation of the Boneyard Bell on November 22nd. SGA President Anderson Ward revived this tradition after discovering the bell, which had been stored away for over a decade. It is now located just behind the escalators outside the Main Campus Student Center. The bell will serve as a symbolic part of the student experience. Where incoming students will ring it upon arrival at ECU, and graduating students will ring it as they bid farewell. A plaque has been installed to commemorate its significance.

SGA's Executive Cabinet also voted to invest in a photo booth that will provide students with professional headshots. The booth is expected to be installed within 90 days, with a tentative launch date of late March or early April.

Additionally, SGA is preparing to distribute 400 to 500 sleep and well-being kits during the upcoming "Are You Okay?" Day event, scheduled for the end of March. This initiative aims to promote mental health and student wellness.

SGA recently completed its Swipe Out Hunger program for the spring semester, securing an additional 153 donated meals, bringing the total number of meals collected to 393 across the fall and spring semesters.

Sachania also provided a personal update, noting that he transitioned from Speaker of the Student Assembly to Student Body Attorney General, which is why he was present to deliver the update.

Lastly, he announced that SGA elections have officially begun, with campaigning starting on February 12th at 8 a.m. He reminded faculty members that they should not endorse, campaign for, or seek support for any candidate running in the elections. If a candidate approaches faculty for endorsements or campaign-related activities, they should report the incident to SGA Elections at

ecu.edu, as it constitutes a violation of election rules. The results of the election will be shared with the Staff Senate in March.

Treasurer's Report

Jennifer Jones, Staff Senate Treasurer

Treasurer Jones provided an update on the Staff Senate's financial balances and recent transactions.

The beginning balance for state funds was \$9,249, and the ending balance was \$8,745. The only expenses recorded were the chair stipend for two pay periods.

For the second State Fund account, the beginning balance was - \$1,224, and the ending balance improved to - \$148, following a reimbursement from the Staff Assembly meeting in November, which was received on January 6th.

Regarding Discretionary Funds, the beginning balance was \$34,631, and the ending balance was \$34,592. The only expenses were related to items purchased for the hot chocolate bar at the December meeting. Next month's report will reflect the earmark bill for the December meeting.

For Scholarship Funds, payments were made for two scholarships from the SBA Employees' Children Scholarship and two from the Gil Jordan Memorial Scholarship.

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

Committee Updates

Executive Committee

Bri Wood provided an update from the Executive Committee, beginning with details about the Spring Staff Assembly Meeting, which will be held at ECU on April 14th and 15th. Delegates from ECU's 17 sister UNC institutions will visit campus to discuss key issues affecting staff. This event will also provide an opportunity for ECU representatives to showcase the campus to their colleagues from across the system.

Looking ahead to the fall, the Chancellor's Cup Golf Tournament will take place on Monday, September 29th, at Waynesville Inn & Golf Club in Western Carolina. Volunteers will be needed to travel west and represent ECU at the event.

Wood also shared an update on a new coffee shop on campus. Awaken Coffee has opened in the Health Sciences Student Center, taking over the space previously occupied by Starbucks. In addition to serving coffee, Awaken Coffee provides employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, supporting inclusivity within the community.

Before concluding, Wood gave a shoutout to Senator Chad Carwein, who helped bring ECU Sustainability efforts to a recent men's basketball game. She noted that it was exciting to see fellow Staff Senators making an impact on campus and in the local community.

By-Laws Committee

Committee Chair Lauren Arp provided an update on the Bylaws Committee, stating that the committee is actively working to support the Committee Revision Task Force. They are currently waiting for updates but have gathered substantial information from other UNC system institutions better to understand potential future directions for committee roles and responsibilities. She noted that the committee is making steady progress and will continue to provide updates as developments arise.

Communication and Marketing Committee

Erin Gray provided an update from the Communications & Marketing Committee, beginning with a few key reminders. She emphasized that all marketing materials, graphics, and communications requests should be submitted through the request form available on the committee's webpage. This process helps keep requests organized and ensures timely handling.

Additionally, Gray reminded staff that all emails intended for campus-wide dissemination should be sent through the Executive Committee for approval. She also encouraged staff to allow as much lead time as possible when submitting requests, as committee members have other responsibilities outside of Staff Senate and may be unable to accommodate last-minute requests. Furthermore, some requests may experience delays due to approval processes from other departments on campus, which can impact the overall timeline.

Lastly, Gray shared that the committee is working to resume a regular rotation of Committee Spotlight posts and aims to increase their frequency in the coming months. She thanked everyone for their cooperation and support.

Human Resources Committee

Michelle Smith provided an update on the Human Resources Committee regarding the Staff Emeritus process. She is working on what she refers to as the "process side" of Staff Emeritus, collaborating with colleagues in Post-Employment Services to ensure smooth processing.

Smith shared that she had spoken with eight nominees that day, all of whom accepted their nominations and expressed excitement and gratitude. As part of the process, she is also reaching out to additional nominees to confirm their retirement dates, as some individuals may be planning for retirement but have not yet formally retired. If a nominee has not yet retired, they may still submit their nomination and proceed with retirement at a later date.

Additionally, she is reviewing eligibility requirements, including the three-year service rule, and has identified one nominee who may not qualify. Smith assured the committee that progress was being made and that she would continue working through the verification and approval steps. She concluded by stating that the process is moving along well.

Leadership and Professional Development Committee

Joani Zary provided an update on the Leadership & Professional Development Committee, noting that it met on Monday, January 27th, to discuss upcoming initiatives.

The committee reviewed tentative plans for a potential presentation of "The Whole U", scheduled for April 14th. However, a specific time has not yet been confirmed, as they are awaiting further details from Rob Weatherly.

Additionally, planning is underway for the BALL Event, which will take place on Monday, April 28th, at 2 p.m. The committee established an advertising schedule, assigned tasks for creating an RSVP survey via Qualtrics, and is exploring live-streaming options for the event. They are also in the process of ordering a speaker gift and coordinating refreshments for attendees. The committee will continue working on finalizing these details in the coming weeks.

Membership Committee

Laura Fanning provided an update on the Membership Committee, stating that nominations have been received and statement ballots are currently being collected. The committee hopes to begin elections next week.

At this time, elections will only be held for the divisions of Academic Affairs, Administration & Finance, and Student Affairs. Not enough nominations were received for Brody or University Advancement, meaning some seats in those divisions will remain current alternates or vacant.

Additionally, there are two vacant seats in Athletics, which the committee plans to address through a motion later in the meeting. While the election process is progressing well, the committee still needs additional nominations for Brody, as that division has several vacant seats. The Membership Committee will continue working to fill these gaps moving forward.

Recognition and Rewards Committee

Dana Lopez provided an update on the Recognition & Rewards Committee, highlighting upcoming events for Staff Appreciation Month, now just six weeks away. The celebration kicks off with Spirit Week from April 1st through April 4th. A detailed calendar of events will be provided, and the committee will share updates and highlights through a social media takeover.

On April 5th, ECU Athletics is offering discounted tickets for staff and their families to attend the ECU Baseball game vs. Florida Atlantic for \$4 per ticket.

On April 12th, Family Day at NRC (North Recreational Complex) will take place, where staff and their families can enjoy activities such as a zip line, boating, food trucks, Kona Ice, and inflatable bounce houses. This event promises to be a fun-filled Saturday for all participants.

From April 7th through April 11th, the committee will host a Staff Appreciation Meal on Main Campus. The committee is still finalizing the date and details for a similar event at the Health Sciences Campus, but Lopez reassured attendees that those staff members will not be left out.

Additionally, an online auction will take place, with more details to be shared by the Scholarship Committee.

From April 14th through April 18th, staff will receive free access to Campus Recreation & Wellness facilities, including the Eakin Student Recreation Center on Main Campus and the Health Sciences Recreation Center.

The committee is also working on securing a 20% off coupon at Academy Sports, along with other potential discounts and offers, as well as offering free passport photos again this year. To conclude Staff Appreciation Month, the Outstanding Staff Awards Ceremony will take place on May 1st. Nominations for these awards are currently open, and staff are encouraged to submit nominations before the March 9th deadline.

Lopez concluded by emphasizing the committee's commitment to ensuring a successful and engaging Staff Appreciation Month for all ECU employees.

Scholarship Committee

Jenny Gregory provided an update on the Scholarship Committee, reporting that this year there were 17 applications for the Children of Staff Scholarship and 11 for the Gail Jordan Memorial Scholarship. The committee has submitted selections for winners in each category, but final details are still being processed. A more detailed update on the winners will be provided next month.

Gregory also discussed plans for the annual online auction, which serves as a fundraiser for scholarship initiatives. A Qualtrics survey will be sent out to coordinate auction items, and each committee is asked to contribute by creating a themed basket for the auction. Themes could include ideas like a "Night Out on the Town" basket or a Lottery Ticket Scratch-Off basket. Committees can raise funds, purchase, or solicit donations for their basket contributions.

The deadline for auction item submissions is tentatively set for April 4th, pending final confirmation. In addition to committee contributions, the Scholarship Committee is working with ECU Athletics to secure donated items from basketball, baseball, and football. They are also exploring higher-end experiences on consignment, such as tickets to major sporting events like The Masters, which could attract higher-value bidders.

The online auction is expected to run from April 10th through April 18th, with final dates to be confirmed. Gregory encouraged all committees to start planning their contributions and emphasized the importance of this fundraiser in supporting scholarships for ECU staff and their families.

Well-Being Committee

Summer Edwards provided an update from the Well-Being Committee, highlighting preparations for the upcoming Fourth Annual Women Leaders at ECU Panel. The event is scheduled for Thursday, March 6th, from 3:00 to 4:30 PM in the Main Campus Student Center Ballroom A.

This year's panel theme is "Creating Space to Enhance Employee Well-Being and Workforce Success." The panelists have been finalized and will be moderated by Toya Jacobs. Participants can attend either in person or virtually, allowing flexibility.

The committee will soon send out RSVP and invitation details and encourage Staff Senate members to share the event within their departments to ensure a strong campus-wide turnout.

Old Business

Crystal Hildenbrand, Staff Senate Chair

Update from Committee Realignment Taskforce

Senator Jenna Boardman provided an update on the Committee Realignment Task Force, stating that the group has met several times and is actively working to identify the best path forward for Staff Senate restructuring. The task force is conducting extensive research and data analysis, with special thanks to the Bylaws Committee for their efforts in comparing ECU's structure with UNC Wilmington and other sister schools.

One key point from the initial feedback survey was the importance of maintaining open communication with the full Senate. In response, the task force has developed a second feedback survey, which asks members to rank the top priorities and major events that Staff Senate is involved in. The goal is to determine which activities and initiatives should remain the Senate's primary focus moving forward.

The survey includes 13 ranked items, with respondents asked to mark #1 as the most important for the Senate to continue. Boardman emphasized that this survey will only remain open until tomorrow, as the task force will meet again next week to review the results. She urged all senators to complete the survey as soon as possible, as it only takes a few minutes.

Boardman concluded by thanking task force members for their dedication to this project and assured the Senate that further updates would be provided at the next meeting.

New Business

Crystal Hildenbrand, Staff Senate Chair

A motion was introduced regarding staff members serving in dual reporting structures and their eligibility to participate in Staff Senate elections. The initial motion proposed that individuals in a dual reporting structure be allowed to run in elections for either or both of the units they serve under, based on available open seats.

After discussion, it was clarified that the motion intended to allow dual-reporting employees to run and vote in Staff Senate elections but only for one of the units they report to, rather than both. There was also debate about whether a vacant seat in the unit should be required for eligibility. After further consideration, it was agreed that employees in dual reporting structures should be able to choose which unit they want to represent, regardless of open seat availability.

To implement this change for the current election cycle, a revised motion was introduced:

"I move that employees with a dual reporting structure be eligible to run and vote in Staff Senate elections for either and only one of the units they report to for the 2025 election cycle."

The motion was approved by voice vote with no opposition.

There was also discussion about making this change permanent by incorporating it into the Staff Senate Bylaws. However, since elections are approaching, it was decided that this adjustment would apply only to the 2025 election cycle, with a separate vote to determine if it should be formally added to the bylaws in the future.

Announcements

Crystal Hildenbrand, Staff Senate Chair

In closing, Chair Crystal Hildenbrand announced that the next Staff Senate meeting will be held on Thursday, March 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.