

Staff Senate Monthly Meeting

March 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 February 13, 2025, meeting minutes were emailed to Staff Senate members. No corrections were received, and the minutes were approved as presented.

Legislative Updates

Karson Hallow, Director of Strategic Initiatives & Legislative Liaison

Karson Hallow, on behalf of the Chancellor's Office, provided an update on state and federal government affairs. She emphasized that change is constant and that all information provided reflects the most current knowledge. Questions were welcomed, and she offered to follow up if needed.

She began by reviewing how the UNC System legislative advocacy process works. The UNC System President serves as the primary spokesperson to governmental bodies and extends that authorization to Chancellors and their designated legislative liaisons. ECU has two liaisons: Karson herself and Michelle Brooks, Executive Vice Dean of the School of Medicine. They coordinate closely with the UNC System's Vice President for Government Affairs to align ECU's priorities with system-wide objectives.

Regarding the state budget, Hallow explained that North Carolina operates on a biennial budget cycle. With a new administration under Governor Josh Stein, the process has slowed due to staffing transitions. The governor's proposed budget is expected soon, followed by budget versions from the Senate and House. The Senate aims to release its version by Easter and the House by Memorial Day. Although delays are common, the state's automatic continuing resolution ensures government operations continue past the July 1 fiscal year start.

Karson shared data from the General Assembly showing where members earned their degrees. While ECU is the state's fourth-largest university, its alumni representation in the legislature is modest, with four graduates currently serving—one of whom is still a student. She also reviewed the local legislative delegation, which remains unchanged: Senator Kandie Smith (Pitt and Edgecombe Counties), Representative Gloristine Brown (North Pitt County), and Representative Tim Reeder (South Pitt County).

She then discussed UNC System budget priorities, which include recurring funding for enrollment and performance formulas, building reserves, and faculty and staff compensation. For capital priorities, projects must be one-time, nonrecurring investments and are pulled from each campus's six-year capital plan.

A key topic was the performance-based funding formula, which evaluates campuses on metrics such as graduation rates. Due to legislative concerns about uncontrolled growth in funding, the UNC System has implemented a \$30 million cap for performance funding allocations. ECU's expected allocation is \$3.3 million for FY 2025–2026.

She also highlighted ECU's top campus-specific request: a \$9.375 million nonrecurring legislative appropriation to help establish the Chancellor Scholars Initiative—a talent retention scholarship fund to recruit top North Carolina students. This one-time state investment would be matched 1:1 by private donations to create endowed scholarships for high-achieving in-state students. The initiative aims to make ECU more competitive with out-of-state schools that waive non-resident tuition, a tactic that contributed to ECU losing 922 admitted students last year to southeastern universities. That loss equated to \$11 million in missed revenue.

Karson provided updates on ongoing and upcoming capital projects, including Brody School of Medicine envelope repairs and student housing at the Coastal Studies Institute. She emphasized the urgent need for housing in the Outer Banks due to high living costs post-COVID.

She also touched on the UNC System's one policy priority for the legislative session: allowing discounted tuition rates for active-duty military based in North Carolina. Service members are discouraged from attending UNC schools because tuition exceeds the \$250/credit hour military cap. Granting universities the ability to match this cap would retain more service members in the state's higher education institutions.

Shifting to federal affairs, Karson noted that continuing resolutions were still in flux, and a government shutdown loomed depending on Senate action. The continuing resolution under debate would cut education funding by \$200 billion and exclude earmarks—problematic for ECU, which had two pending federal appropriations.

The FY 2026 federal appropriations process remains delayed as offices await the president's budget and new guidelines. The UNC System's federal priorities include reducing the administrative burden on research institutions, increasing campus-based aid, and ensuring consistency in federal regulations.

She concluded with concerns about significant shifts at the Department of Education under newly appointed Secretary Linda McMahon, who has signaled intent to downsize the agency. Responsibilities such as Title IX and financial aid may be transferred to other federal departments. Other federal proposals are closely monitored, like risk-sharing (where institutions would repay defaulted student loans), graduate borrowing caps, and changes to accreditation and loan forgiveness programs.

Karson affirmed that ECU and the UNC System are actively advocating these issues. Staff are encouraged to contact her or Michelle Brooks if federal or state policy changes impact their units. She thanked the staff for their continued support and opened the floor for questions.

Faculty Senate Update

Dr. Anne Ticknor, Chair of the Faculty Senate

Dr. Anne Ticknor began her remarks by sharing a celebratory update—the Faculty Senate is marking its 60th anniversary this year. A celebration will be held on April 7th from 4:00–6:00 p.m. in Harvey Hall, and all are invited to attend. Dr. Ticknor emphasized that the faculty relies on partnerships across campus and wanted the event to include everyone involved in supporting faculty work. The event will include live music from faculty members, presentations to past chairs, and additional recognitions. She thanked Debbie Edwards, Megan Ayers, and Rachel Baker for helping coordinate the celebration and RSVPs.

Shifting to more serious topics, Dr. Ticknor discussed the impacts of a February 5th memo from the UNC System Office, which led to suspending diversity-intensive graduation requirements across the system. This announcement caused concern and confusion among faculty, particularly about how to comply while ensuring faculty involvement. Dr. Ticknor clarified that she had assisted with the curriculum change timeline but was not involved in identifying courses subject to the suspension.

ECU had previously required students to complete courses in global and domestic diversity (GD and DD), which were easily identified and suspended. Interim Provost Buddo reported that approximately 6,000 students were enrolled in GD or DD courses in spring 2024, with only 16 opting out. While students were not required to take the courses, the low opt-out rate suggests continued student interest in diversity-related coursework.

Academic programs were asked to respond in one of three ways: 1) identify courses flagged in error (false positives), 2) request a waiver (applied for by the Chancellor), or 3) submit a Level I revision to the course or program. Dr. Ticknor expects that most flagged courses were false positives. She has requested updates on these submissions so that Faculty Senate committees, which will process any necessary revisions, can plan accordingly. She emphasized that faculty within the programs made the initial decisions and that all changes would proceed through standard Faculty Senate processes.

The February 5th memo also included guidance affecting academic codes. Due to policy changes implemented last summer, 23 codes were moved to provisional status. Dr. Ticknor noted that some updates to the Faculty Manual were already in progress, and others were necessary following this change. She encouraged attendees to visit the newly revamped Faculty Manual webpage.

She also shared that the Faculty Assembly (the system-wide faculty body) had passed a resolution opposing perceived infringements on academic freedom following the system memo. ECU was one of the first universities to endorse this resolution. Additionally, the Faculty Assembly Executive Committee, on which Dr. Ticknor serves, sent a letter to President Hans supporting the resolution. These actions have received media attention, including coverage in the News & Observer.

Regarding Faculty Senate business, Dr. Ticknor reported that a nominating committee was formed in February to prepare a slate of officers—Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary—for the 2025–2026 term. The slate will be voted on at the April 29th organizational meeting. Dr. Ticknor, currently in her third term as Chair, expressed that this would likely be her final term.

She also provided an update from the Committee on Committees, which is reviewing committee charges. A new proposed committee—the Engagement Education Committee—had its first reading and will receive a second reading in March. If approved, it will be submitted to the Chancellor for final approval. This committee aims to bring together the university's community engagement initiatives with its QEP, "Go Intercultural," to align with the curriculum and provide better tracking of curriculum-based community engagement. Dr. Ticknor noted that while ECU has received national recognition for engagement, tracking its curriculum integration has been lacking, and this committee would help address that gap.

She concluded her remarks by inviting questions and thanking everyone.

Treasurer's Report

Jennifer Jones, Staff Senate Treasurer

Treasurer Jennifer Jones reported minimal financial activity for the month of February. From the state funds, the primary expenses were the Staff Senate Chair stipend and two payroll disbursements, resulting in a remaining balance of \$8,242.69. She noted a formatting error in the report and stated she would review it upon returning to her computer.

Regarding the UNC Staff Assembly funds, reimbursements related to the Chancellor's Cup Golf Tournament were reclassified. Expenses originally recorded under the UNC Assembly were moved to the Staff Senate budget, as confirmed by the Business Office. These included reimbursements for Crystal and Jenna's participation and a reimbursement for Garrett Killian, which had been processed in the previous fiscal year. As expected, these adjustments brought the UNC Staff Assembly fund balance to zero.

In the discretionary fund, expenditures included travel reimbursements for Crystal and Jenna's attendance at the golf tournament and an Aramark catering charge for hot chocolate served at the December Staff Senate meeting. The discretionary account had a remaining balance of \$34,209.52. Jennifer noted that these funds would soon be utilized for recognition and rewards initiatives.

No activity was reported in the scholarship fund for the month of February. Jennifer concluded her report by asking if there were any questions.

Committee Updates

Executive Committee

Crystal Hildenbrand provided several updates on behalf of the Executive Committee. She encouraged senators to attend one of the remaining People Success Employee Roundtable discussions hosted by Toya Jacobs. Two sessions remained at the time—one in person and one virtual—scheduled for March 26 and 27. These sessions have been informative and well-received, and participation is appreciated.

She shared that Staff Senate will not be hosting a table at summer orientations this year due to restructuring efforts by the orientation team. However, the team has extended an invitation for Staff Senate to participate in "Parents Night Out," held at Uptown Brewery from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. on the first evening of each orientation session. Crystal asked members to consider if there would be enough volunteer interest to support staffing a table at all ten orientation sessions.

Staff Senate will host a table at the Laupus Library Spring Fling on April 1 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Senator Jennifer Jones will coordinate volunteers for that event. Senators were asked to contribute ideas for an interactive and creative activity to include at the table.

Crystal also promoted an upcoming in-person training on March 25 from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m., featuring guest speaker Liz Priestley from Com Psych. The session, titled "Making Connections in Work and Life," is part of ECU's Are U OK Day and You Matter Week. At the time of the meeting, only five seats remained available.

Are U OK Day is scheduled for Wednesday, March 26. This initiative supports mental health and well-being across campus. It will include health and wellness fairs, a "Let's Talk" session hosted by the Center for Counseling and Student Development, mental health check-ins, an Inside Out 2 watch party, prize giveaways, and free food. Volunteers are needed for the event, and a sign-up link was shared via campus email.

Looking ahead to the May meeting, Crystal reminded the group that a new Executive Committee would be elected. While current elections were still underway, she encouraged senators to consider running for leadership positions or nominating someone. Interested individuals were invited to contact any current executive committee member to learn more about each role's responsibilities and time commitments. Positions up for election include parliamentarian, treasurer, secretary, vice chair, and chair-elect. Bri Wood will transition into the Chair role on June 1.

Lastly, Crystal announced that ECU will host the UNC System Staff Assembly meeting on April 14 and 15 in the Main Campus Student Center, room 249. Senators who are not delegates but are interested in attending as visitors were asked to contact Crystal so they can be registered. While visitors do not have speaking privileges, they are welcome to observe. The meeting is expected to run from approximately 12:00–4:00 p.m. on Monday and 9:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m. on Tuesday.

By-Laws Committee

No update.

Communication and Marketing Committee

No update.

Human Resources Committee

Michelle Smith provided a brief update on behalf of the Human Resources Committee. She shared that a link had been posted in the meeting chat for those interested in volunteering as proctors for Pitt County Schools.

Leadership and Professional Development Committee

Joani Zary provided an update from the Leadership & Professional Development Committee. The committee met on Teams on February 24 to discuss upcoming events and initiatives. The first event highlighted was a new workshop titled “The Whole U,” scheduled for Monday, April 14, from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m. in the Main Campus Student Center, Room 125. Light refreshments will be served.

Email announcements began circulating in early March, and registration is available through Cornerstone. The workshop is designed for employees interested in learning to market themselves better and build a personal career strategy. Topics include identifying and branding transferable skills, managing one’s social media presence, and reflecting on preparing for future career opportunities. The session will be interactive and part of a new initiative the committee is helping pilot. Joani noted that Rob Weatherly is particularly excited about the launch of this new presentation.

The committee is also preparing for its major spring event, “The Ballard’s Annual Lessons in Leadership Speaker Series,” which will be held on Sunday, April 28, from 2:00–4:00 p.m. in the Black Box Theater. Although Dr. Steve Ballard cannot attend in person, he has submitted a written statement that will be read during the event's introduction. Advertising is already underway, and a Qualtrics

RSVP link will be included in upcoming emails. The event will be live-streamed and will include refreshments.

Joani noted that some final details are still being finalized for both events and encouraged attendees to watch for future email announcements and to participate if possible.

Membership Committee

Laura Fanning gave a brief update from the Membership Committee, noting that Staff Senate elections were nearly complete. She encouraged those in the remaining four units that received ballots to submit their votes if they had not already done so.

Recognition and Rewards Committee

Dana Lopez shared several updates from the Recognition and Rewards Committee, noting that Staff Appreciation Month is quickly approaching. Spirit Week will kick off on Tuesday, April 1, and staff are encouraged to participate and send photos of their involvement to the Communications and Marketing Committee for social media promotion. A full calendar of events will be shared once marketing materials are finalized.

This year, two ECU Baseball games have been designated for staff participation—Saturday, April 5 and Sunday, April 6—with discounted tickets for \$4 per person. Staff are encouraged to attend and enjoy the events with colleagues and family.

The Staff Appreciation Meal will take place during the week of April 7–11. Unlike previous years, this year's meal will be preloaded onto staff members' One Cards, allowing them to dine at Todd or West End Dining Hall without an RSVP. However, an RSVP will be required for those attending the Health Sciences Campus Cookout on Tuesday, April 8, so that organizers can plan for food quantities. The One Card swipe will still be used at the HSC location, and staff may choose one meal location only.

Family Day is scheduled for April 12 at the North Recreational Complex from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. The event will include a Kona Ice truck with 130 free cups, bounce houses, food trucks, and activities for all ages. Staff are encouraged to bring their families and spread the word within their divisions.

On April 17, the International House will offer free passport photos for staff from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m. Additionally, Campus Recreation and Wellness will provide free access to their facilities from April 21 to 25 at the Health Sciences Campus Student Center and the Eakin Student Recreation Center on main campus.

Dana also praised her committee for their hard work, especially as they met twice in one week to review 116 nominations for the Outstanding Staff Awards. Based on feedback from the Executive Committee, the committee decided to increase the number of award recipients for the university's three largest divisions—Academic Affairs, Administration and Finance, and the Brody School of Medicine—each with over 1,000 employees. These divisions will now have three award recipients

each, while all other divisions will continue to have one recipient. This new structure aligns recognition proportionately with division size, leaving room for future growth.

The Outstanding Staff Awards Ceremony will be held on May 1, concluding Staff Appreciation Month.

Scholarship Committee

Jenny Gregory provided a detailed update from the Scholarship Committee, focusing primarily on preparations for the upcoming online auction. A sign-up form has been distributed so that Staff Senate committees can commit to providing a themed gift basket for the auction. Jenny reminded members that committee member Carmilla has posted suggested basket ideas in Teams, though participants are welcome to be creative and submit baskets beyond those suggestions.

This year's auction will include a new element—a partnership with a charity auction company offering high-end items such as sports memorabilia and travel experiences, including the possibility of Super Bowl tickets and all-inclusive resort stays. These items are offered at no cost to the committee unless purchased. A base price is set, and the committee will earn any funds raised above that price. If an item does not sell, there is no financial loss.

ECU Athletics is also contributing athletic memorabilia and experiences to the auction, helping to provide a diverse selection of items at various price points to attract a wide range of bidders. The auction will run from April 9th to 16th, and the deadline to submit baskets is April 4th. Baskets should be delivered to Jenny Gregory (East Campus) or Michelle Bone (West Campus). Michelle will photograph and upload the items onto the auction platform.

Jenny noted that the auction company will provide marketing materials to help generate interest and that the team has been coordinating with Accounts Payable and university staff to ensure a smooth payment process. She also referenced a successful auction hosted by a local Greenville nonprofit using the same company, including a highly sought-after Taylor Swift item.

In scholarship news, the committee has awarded five \$500 Gail Jordan Staff Scholarships, which have been approved, and recipients are being notified. Additionally, two \$1,000 scholarships and four \$750 scholarships were awarded for the Children of Staff Scholarships. Winners will be officially recognized at the May Staff Senate meeting.

Jenny encouraged everyone to reach out with questions and submit basket commitments and auction contributions as soon as possible to allow time for setup and promotion.

Well-Being Committee

Bret Wilson shared an update from the Well-Being Committee. He noted that while the committee's recent panel event had to be canceled, plans are underway to host a similar panel or another event promoting well-being practices on campus next year. The committee remains focused on celebrating and supporting staff well-being and identifying best practices that can be shared across the university.

Bret also informed attendees about an upcoming employee well-being survey being distributed by the Office for People Operations and Success (POSO). The survey will launch next week and help ECU assess employee well-being, gather feedback on existing programs and policies, support institutional goals, and establish baseline data for tracking long-term improvements. Bret encouraged everyone to complete the survey promptly upon receipt, noting that it should only take 10–15 minutes to complete. Anyone with questions or technical issues related to the survey can contact Toya Jacobs at POSO for assistance.

Old Business

Crystal Hildenbrand, Staff Senate Chair

Update from Committee Realignment Taskforce

Jenna Boardman provided an update on behalf of the Committee Realignment Task Force. She began by thanking senators for their feedback and expressing appreciation to task force members for their hard work. The group has been working since the fall to develop a new committee structure to improve efficiency, enhance collaboration, and better serve the ECU staff community.

Jenna offered context for newer senators, explaining that the proposed restructuring aims to streamline committee responsibilities, strengthen representation, and promote engagement across the university. She emphasized that all changes are currently proposals and that there will be another opportunity for feedback before any formal motion is presented.

The proposed structure would eliminate the Membership Committee and the Well-Being Committee but maintain eight standing committees overall to ensure strong staff representation. Responsibilities formerly handled by the Membership Committee—such as recruitment, recordkeeping, and elections—would shift to the Vice Chair of the Executive Committee. During peak election times, an ad hoc committee may be created to assist if additional support is needed.

A new Community Service Committee would be added to increase staff engagement in volunteer and outreach opportunities. This committee would oversee efforts such as the school supply drive, blood drive, Mr. Beast-related volunteering opportunities, and assistance with student move-in days.

Jenna reviewed updates to each of the eight proposed standing committees:

- **Executive Committee:** Will retain responsibility for staff representation and foster cross-departmental collaboration. The Vice Chair will manage membership functions.
- **Governance Committee (formerly Bylaws):** This committee will maintain the Senate's structure and ensure compliance with its bylaws. For streamlined decision-making, it will be limited to two members plus the parliamentarian.

- **Communications and Marketing Committee:** This committee will lead internal and external communication efforts, including social media, graphic design, and ideally, a Staff Senate newsletter to improve visibility and engagement.
- **Staff Welfare Committee (formerly Human Resources):** This committee will focus on staff-friendly policies and wellness initiatives, serve as a voice for workplace concerns, and oversee events like the Wellness Walk.
- **Leadership and Professional Development Committee:** This committee coordinates leadership panels, speaker events, and other professional growth opportunities, such as the Ballard Speaker Series and a future leadership panel.
- **Recognition and Awards Committee:** The committee will continue organizing Staff Appreciation Month, the Outstanding Staff Awards, and the Staff Emeritus program, promoting morale and recognition.
- **Scholarship Committee:** This committee will oversee the review and awarding of scholarships, coordinate the silent auction, and lead other fundraising efforts to support staff educational opportunities.
- **Community Service Committee (new):** This committee will focus on creating and organizing opportunities for staff to serve the campus and broader community.

Jenna summarized that while the total number of standing committees remains at eight, responsibilities will be realigned to ensure balance. The Governance Committee will have capped membership, and the newly proposed Community Service Committee will support outreach efforts.

The proposed structure and committee realignment document will be posted in Teams, with an open comment period lasting until Friday, March 28. This timeline provides flexibility for feedback, especially with spring break approaching. The task force will continue refining committee charges and determining appropriate membership sizes based on the total number of senators and alternates. Volunteers will be given the opportunity to express committee preferences, though assignments may be necessary if gaps remain.

In response to questions, Jenna clarified that the Governance Committee structure is open to feedback, including whether a chair should be designated. Additionally, final decisions on the number of members per committee will be determined during the next phase of the process.

New Business

Crystal Hildenbrand, Staff Senate Chair

Announcements

Crystal Hildenbrand, Staff Senate Chair

- Chad Carwein, representing Administration and Finance, shared an update regarding a campus-wide service initiative. While the university has previously hosted an annual event called Yam Jam—a partnership between the Sustainability Program, the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement, and other campus groups—this year’s event will not occur. Yam Jam typically involved sorting approximately 40,000 pounds of sweet potatoes for distribution to families in need across eastern North Carolina through the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina, composting any spoiled produce.

In place of Yam Jam, Chad announced a new Stop and Serve event, which will take place on Tuesday, March 18, from 12:00–3:00 p.m. This initiative collaborates with Campus Housing, the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement, and various student organizations. The event will include two service projects at different campus locations: one at Mendenhall Brickyard (near the student recreation center and bus loop), where volunteers will conduct a large-scale waste audit of trash from Fletcher Residence Hall, and a second project at Ballard Residence Hall on College Hill in the sound rooms.

Students, staff, and faculty are encouraged to sign up via GivePulse, where they can commit to 30-minute shifts or more, depending on availability. Those interested in using community service leave should confirm eligibility with their supervisor. The goal is to maintain the spirit of campus-wide service despite Yam Jam’s cancellation. Event details and links to sign up can also be found on the Staff Senate website under the events section.

- Jenna Boardman reminded staff that while April is Staff Appreciation Month, it’s also a great opportunity to give back. She encouraged staff to participate in ECU Alumni Days of Service, a volunteer initiative organized by the Alumni Association. Throughout April, volunteer opportunities are available via GivePulse, and staff are welcome to sign up and contribute their time.
- Crystal Hildenbrand informed senators that due to ongoing construction and space constraints, the Staff Senate will likely be unable to hold meetings in their current room after May. Alternative locations are being explored. While attempts have been made to reserve space in the Main Campus Student Center, scheduling conflicts with events such as Board of Trustees meetings and Voyages of Discovery programs have limited availability. The new Biotech building was also considered, but staff were advised that it is intended strictly for academic and research purposes.

Another location is being explored, and Crystal assured the group that updates would be provided once a suitable space was confirmed. She noted that, depending on the progress of construction, the move away from the current location may be in place through 2027.

Jenna Boardman added that meeting dates may also need to shift next year, as securing the second Thursday of each month in the Student Center may not always be possible. The bylaws do not require meetings on that specific day, so flexibility will be needed when scheduling future meetings. Additionally, some fall meetings may be affected by Thursday football games.

In closing, Chair Crystal Hildenbrand announced that the next Staff Senate meeting will be held on Thursday, April 10th, 2025, at 3:00 p.m. in the Main Campus Student Center, Room 249.

The meeting adjourned at 4:45 p.m.

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