

University System of Georgia Staff Council Meeting  
September 30, 2015

**Representatives in attendance:** Albany State University, Bainbridge State College, Clayton State University, Columbus State University, Fort Valley State University, Georgia College & State University, Georgia Gwinnett College, Georgia Institute of Technology, Georgia Southern University, Georgia Southwestern State University, Kennesaw State University, Middle Georgia State College, Savannah State University, University of Georgia, University of North Georgia, University of West Georgia, Valdosta State University

**Guests in attendance:** Marion Fedrick, Vice Chancellor for Human Resources, University System of Georgia, Dr. Chris Markwood, President, Columbus State University

Amber Dees, Columbus State University, welcomed everyone to the conference. Ms. Dees informed the group about the plans for the day and the travel arrangements for the evening meal at the Coca-Cola Space Center.

Dr. Chris Markwood welcomed the group to Columbus State University. Dr. Markwood told the attendees that they were “extremely important to the operation and mission of every campus represented here and to the broader mission of higher education in this state.” He also said that “our students are nurtured by you. Our students are embraced and mentored by you. And so I hope in your discussions in your professional development and in your networking you build each other up and support each other in the very important work that you do for our students in the state of Georgia.”

Tim Aldridge welcomed the group to the conference. He quoted Robert Greenleaf, author of *The Servant as a Leader*. “The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served.” Mr. Aldridge stated that “it is my goal that the USG Staff Council stays focused on our top four concerns for our staff this year and that I will lead you with the qualities of a servant leader.

Mr. Aldridge introduced the Executive Council: Marie Mize, Secretary; Erin Brannon, Treasurer; and Debbie Chimeno, Past Chair. Alberta Cook, Chair-Elect, was not in attendance because she was on vacation.

Marie Mize passed out copies of the July minutes and asked for any corrections. Mr. Aldridge suggested the group be given time to look over the minutes and asked Ms. Brannon to call the roll and present the budget.

Erin Brannon called roll. Ms. Brannon stated that everyone in attendance was up to date on dues. She passed out the treasurer’s report. Report was approved.

Mr. Aldridge asked for approval of minutes. Minutes were approved.

PR Committee Report: Ms. Mize, Co-chair of committee, stated that the PR team contacted institutions that had not registered for conference to encourage attendance. She stated that we finally had access to the website. She asked delegates to look at the USG SC website and let the PR team know what needs to be changed. The URL for the Staff Council's website is [http://www.usg.edu/staff\\_council/](http://www.usg.edu/staff_council/)

Bylaws Committee Report: Debbie Chimeno, chair of committee, named and thanked the committee members. Members are Alberta Cook, Kennesaw State; Brenda Keen, University of Georgia; Ashley Ballard, Fort Valley State University; and Geraldine Winns, Albany State University. Ms. Chimeno stated that the most current bylaws are from 10/27/10.

Items up for discussion among the committee and the council include:

- Making the annual conference a one day event
- Providing host institutions money to help pay for conference
- Clarify definition of "member in good standing"
- Add new position "webmaster." Include job duties
- Members' dues
- Delete the voting listserv

Once the committee has agreed to the modifications, the bylaws will be presented to the USG Staff Council. An e-mail notification will be sent to the Staff Council to announce the meeting date and the time of approval vote.

Nominating Committee Report: Erin Brannon, chair of committee, stated that "it is important to have people interested and wanting to serve on the Executive Committee of the USG Staff Council. This is the group that is your liaison with the Board of Regents. We're going to be working really hard to find people that are interested so that when it [Elections] comes around next time we have a great pool of people slated to take over as Chair-Elect, Secretary, and Treasurer." If you are interested in running for office, contact Ms. Brannon.

Executive Committee Update: Tim Aldridge stated that Debbie Chimeno had sent out a survey in the spring asking the institutions to list their top concerns. From these responses the following topics were determined to be the top four concerns for 2015. They are:

- (Concern #1) Merit Raises. For FY2016, the USG appropriated a merit raise pool of .55%. Because of several years of no appropriations by the legislature, or extremely small like FY 16, the USGSC asks for consideration of a 2% merit raise pool for FY2017. This issue affects retention and recruitment of staff.

- (Concern #2) Staff Development. Continuing education is extremely important. It is the process of improving and educating the staff through training opportunities. These training opportunities can happen within or external to the institution. It helps both morale and efficiency of the staff member. (Example: The University of North Georgia has a model where the president budgets \$25,000.00 a year for approximately 1,000 staff to use for staff development. The UNG Staff Council oversees this budget and accepts/denies applications for the use of these funds.) The USGSC would like for the BOR to encourage university presidents to have a budget of at least \$15.00 per staff member for a pool of money to be overseen by the local staff council at that university for the purpose of staff development for that university.
- (Concern #3) Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) for Online Classes. The staff at our institutions who pursue educational opportunities are often the most motivated employees that a university has. The level of TAP is capped and doesn't cover the full cost of online courses, yet the number of those classes has exploded. TAP policy should be updated to reflect current technology, especially since online courses are more flexible for staff taking classes while not interfering with their work schedule. (Example:) Currently a staff member can complete their MBA online at Georgia Southwestern with no out of pocket expense for tuition, while another employee completing a Bachelor's degree online at Valdosta State has to pay approximately \$80.00 per semester hour for tuition that TAP does not cover.) Because the BOR oversees the cost of tuition at all institutions, the USGSC would like for TAP to cover all tuition at all USG institutions for online classes up to the limit of semester hours that TAP currently covers.
- (Concern #4) Controlling Healthcare Costs. With the cost of healthcare insurance rising every year, the USGSC would like for the BOR to consider holding the premiums for healthcare insurance flat in FY2017. With rising healthcare costs and stagnant income growth, the take home pay of our staff has been extremely flat for several years.

Mr. Aldridge called for discussion on Concern #1.

Ms. Brannon stated that she had recently been in a meeting with the President of University of West Georgia. The president gave a report of a recent budget meeting where a 2-3% across the board increase was discussed. This was encouraging.

Mr. Aldridge called for discussion on Concern #2.

Mr. Aldridge discussed the need for staff development and encouraged the representatives to take advantage of training & development opportunities offered at their institutions. He discussed how the program works at UNG and shared that the University of North Georgia has a budget of \$25,000 that is used for staff development. The Executive Committee of the USG Staff Council is asking for a staff development fund of \$15 per staff member to be implemented at each institution.

Keith Warburg (Valdosta State) asked if UNG makes this available to faculty or if it is exclusive to staff. Mr. Aldridge stated that the fund was for staff only. Mr. Warburg then asked if there was any type of accountability for the use of the fund. Mr. Aldridge replied that UNG has not gotten to a point where they are examining what they're doing. Approval comes from the supervisor and the committee before the employee is given funds.

Debbie Chimeno stated that most of the universities have a professional development coordinator within their Human Resources department who would be handling staff development. She asked if the staff development would include training in Microsoft Excel. Mr. Aldridge stated that at UNG Excel training was included. She suggested that the term "staff development" be more defined and clarified.

Brenda Keen mentioned that the University of Georgia has a training and development division in Human Resources, and staff also have access to online courses with Lynda.com and Skillsoft. She suggested that the University System of Georgia be encouraged to make both Lynda.com and Skillsoft available to all institutions. Mr. Aldridge mentioned that Skillsoft is being added to a lot of universities. He asked for a show of hands as to which institutions have Skillsoft. Approximately 50% responded that they do have Skillsoft available at their institutions.

Geraldine Winns asked how the \$25,000 budget came about. Mr. Aldridge stated that three years ago Gainesville State College and North Georgia College were consolidated. At that time NGCSU had a budget for staff development while GSC did not. A year after consolidation Mr. Aldridge, who was chair of University of North Georgia's Staff Council, approached the president and asked for a budget increase of \$10,000.00 which was initially turned down but approved 2 months later.

Kathy Rechsteiner (KSU) asked how UNG managed the funds. Mr. Aldridge stated that the budget comes from the president and is managed through UNG's business office and the UNG Staff Council treasurer. Approval of the funds is decided by a staff development committee made up of staff council members.

Ann Lay (KSU) stated that Southern Polytechnic State University had a similar professional development policy that was \$28,000. This fund was given by the Vice President of Business & Finance. A committee made up of both staff members and the VP of Business & Finance oversaw the fund.

Ms. Winns asked Mr. Aldridge if the Executive Committee met with the Board of Regents. Mr. Aldridge clarified that the Executive Committee did not meet with the BOR but had a phone conference call with Vice Chancellor Marion Fedrick.

Mr. Aldridge called discussion on concern #3.

Representatives discussed the need for TAP (Tuition Assistance Program) to cover online classes.

Question: Do individual universities determine what classes or courses are approved for TAP?

Answer: In the TAP policy, it will tell you what programs are excluded. Sometimes a particular course is under a program that is excluded, then that course could be excluded.

TAP policy can be found at [http://www.usg.edu/hr/benefits/tuition\\_assistance\\_program\\_tap](http://www.usg.edu/hr/benefits/tuition_assistance_program_tap)

Question: If this proposal is approved, will those who have paid be reimbursed?

Answer: No. TAP is not a reimbursement, it is a tuition waiver. There is no money transferred to the institutions. It's just that the tuition is waved. So there aren't any funds to give back to individuals.

Question: What is the current status of this proposal?

Answer: Mr. Aldridge stated that TAP online was one of the top concerns discussed at the USG SC meeting in July. The Staff Council Executive Committee brought this concern to Vice Chancellor Fedrick during a phone conference call in September.

Vice Chancellor Fedrick stated that this conversation started back in the Spring and that the issue should be resolved by the end of the semester.

Mr. Aldridge called for discussion on Concern #4.

Mr. Aldridge stated that Georgia Southern has asked that wellness be included in the conversation. Vice Chancellor Fedrick stated that the health care premiums for 2016 are out. Open enrollment meetings should be starting soon. She also stated that wellness is the only thing

that we are going to be able to do to help change our healthcare cost. VC Fedrick stated that at the upcoming Presidents' retreat, she will ask the Presidents to help support wellness initiatives.

Question: (Tim Aldridge) Do you anticipate from that meeting that we may see a wellness program next year?

Answer: (VC Fedrick) Yes.

VC Fedrick discussed some incentives and options that are being discussed concerning a wellness program, including how to reward healthy behaviors. She also asked representatives to share any ideas they had and discussed using the Staff Council to promote the wellness initiatives.

Mr. Aldridge brought the conversation back to Concern #1, Staff Pay, because discussion had taken place before VC Fedrick arrived at conference.

VC Fedrick stated the budget was presented at a recent Board of Regents meeting. A 1% increase translates into approximately 20 million dollars, and the Chancellor's focus has been on pay increases. She also discussed the guidelines that her office gives to the Presidents. Included in these guidelines is the request that a large portion of the budget be given to the lowest paid employees and a limit put on the amount given to top administrators.

Question: If student tuition continues to go up and universities are getting more money, is there not some way that increases in staff salary can happen?

Answer: VC Fedrick - Tuition goes up, but enrollment has gone down system wide. When you look at the whole picture, that is the challenge. Other parts of the budget, like health care, went up. Money has to be found to handle these increases. Unfortunately, areas like salary, training, and benefits are the first places institutions look.

Question: There is concern about administrative and faculty salary verses staff salary. And there seems to be no money in the budget when it comes to staff salary. However, year after year, I'm seeing an increase in upper administration salary and also faculty salary increases. Is this a BOR issue or is it a university issue?

Answer: VC Fedrick – I'm going to put that on the university. We let the Presidents run but there are also expectations on the Presidents. Presidents are given guidelines but salary increases are a campus-by-campus decision.

Question: Do you have any data that shows where Georgia compares to other states when it comes to averages for staff salaries? How do we compare regionally and nationally, or does that data exist?

Answer: VC Fedrick - That does exist. Every year the Board of Regents participates in at least three salary surveys. And they cut them by local and national dollar amounts. Each campus also

does their own salary surveys. Here's the dilemma with that: we can do those surveys all day long, but if we don't have the money it doesn't make a difference. But we do the surveys, and that's how we develop the case for how much we're going to ask for from the legislators.

Question: Where would we go to see that?

Answer (VC Fedrick) We don't post it, but I could give a copy to Tim. And those surveys come out every year.

Question: While we are talking about salaries, have you run into a situation where you are already working at an institution, you are applying for a job for the next level up at the same institution, and you are told there's a 15% cap and you can't have the salary that is quoted for the job? You can only have an increase of 15% over what you currently make?

VC Fedrick – So what I'm going to say is that should be a policy. It has the effect of a policy and that actually is a standard practice. Normally it's 10%, it's not 15. An increase of 10% or the minimum of the new job rate, that's typical. The policy is okay. If bringing in people from the outside causes an inequity issue, then they're going to have to fix that.

Mr. Aldridge discussed an incorrect statement made during the discussion of Concern #2. He said that at “UNG we have a \$25,000 budget. That's \$25 per employee, not \$250 per employee. So what we're trying to institute is basically \$15 per staff per university as a staff development fund.”

VC Fedrick suggested that the Staff Council look at BOR personnel policies concerning staff training. There is a section that gives a percentage that should be budgeted for training and development. A lot of people don't know that policy is there.

Mr. Aldridge asked for further discussion. Hearing no more discussion he declared the meeting adjourned.