

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA STAFF SENATE MEETING

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

3:00 – 4:30 p.m.

PRESIDING: Megan Colascione, President

Call to Order – Megan Colascione, President

President Colascione officially called the meeting to order at 3:06 PM. President Colascione welcomed staff senators and visitors to the staff senate meeting.

Roll Call/Attendance Report – Julia Hodge, Secretary

Secretary Hodge checked the roll after taking attendance. According to the attendance report, 42 senators were in attendance, 8 senators were absent or online, and no senators gave proxies.

Establish Quorum – Julia Bellon, Parliamentarian

Based on the attendance report, Parliamentarian Bellon declared a quorum was established and declared business could be conducted.

Approval of Minutes – Megan Colascione, President

There were no changes to the March 11, 2025, staff senate meeting minutes. Senator Bellon made a motion to accept the general body staff senate minutes as written. Senator Carey seconded the motion to accept the minutes as written. All senators were in favor. The motion was adopted and carried, and the minutes were accepted as written.

President's Update – Megan Colascione, President

- Celebrate
 - Congratulations to Gamecock Women's Basketball!
 - Give 4 Garnet – Staff Senate raised \$750
 - Cocky Blocks coming in June
 - Congratulations to Dr. Ashley Dantzler for successfully defending her Ph.D. dissertation!
- Collaborate
 - Staff Excellence Awards
 - 10 distinct awards
 - Nominations open April 1-16, 2025
 - Winners will receive recognition at Staff Excellence Awards ceremony on May 19, as well as a plaque and one-time cash prize
 - Everyone who gets nominated will be notified, not just the winners.
 - Staff Appreciation Week: May 19-23, 2025
 - Monday, May 19: Staff Excellence Awards Ceremony
 - Thursday, May 22: Staff Appreciation Day
 - Call of Volunteers – Spring Student Milestones
 - Thursday, April 17 – University Awards Day
 - Wednesday, April 23 – Drive Down Memory Lane
 - Monday, April 28 – Flick on the Field
 - Tuesday, April 29 – Midnight Breakfast
 - May 8-10 – Commencement

- On-campus Pharmacy Delivery Service
 - Share feedback
- Staff Senate Elections
 - 61 applications for senator seats
 - Elections open April 14-28
- Faculty Senate – May 7
 - President Colascione and VP Burkett will be sharing information and priorities of Staff Senate
- Innovate
 - Congratulations to Makayla Rippey for winning the 2025 Staff Appreciation Day design contest!

Guest Speaker – President Michael Amiridis, Ph.D.

- Discussed his worries, such as safety of community, and trends and issues facing higher education, such as a recession and the deterioration of the public trust in higher education
- Thoughts on downsizing of the federal Department of Education
 - Difficult to prepare since we don't actually know what is to come
 - Biggest concern is if there is a removal or downsizing of Pell Grants (at this time, it is not on the table)
 - Concerned about TRiO Programs, Title VI and Title IX, but have not heard anything negative as of yet
 - Relatively small number of grants that have been terminated so far, but we're watching it
 - Also watching the change in IDC distributions from NIH and if it extends to other agencies.
 - No long-term impacts at the moment. It's truly wait and see.
- Staff recruitment, retention, and recognition
 - We are financially strong and are still hiring and not cutting programs. Enrollment has continued to increase, and we are truly a national university with a good reputation.
 - Turnover has significantly decreased (17-18% turnover in 2022, 10% in 2024)
 - Salary analysis occurred and some funds were put into place to cover gaps. We increased salaries for our most vulnerable staff (custodial, etc.)
 - Excited about the new awards and expanded Staff Appreciation Day
- Distance-Education Questions
 - Sees growth in Palmetto College programs and online master's options
 - Does not anticipate much growth in online offerings at the undergraduate level
- IT efforts
 - Centralized IT should focus on larger issues and supporting the colleges
 - Does not want to be completely decentralized, so that we're not have one-off buys, for example
- Where are we right now and where are we headed as a university?
 - We're on a positive trajectory
 - Enrollment, Retention, Graduation, Research, Development, Athletics – all indicate positive movement
 - Still, we cannot ignore the storms around us.
 - Demographic Enrollment Cliff, Recession, Uncertainty, Public Trust

- Discussion of Remote/Hybrid Work
 - We are in the business of offering personalized services. We have created a vibrant environment for the students, and we give them the feeling of being home. We are losing this culture with our employee numbers staying away from campus (including both faculty and staff).
 - Does not want to pivot to more of an AI model – wants to maintain what we are and how we've maintained success.
 - He says it is not micromanaging but instead is a strategic decision to compete with other universities to offer personalized services to students.
 - Is this for the benefit of the students and the community? Then it passes the litmus test, and we will move forward.
 - He is not too concerned about attrition, as he believes we are a strong community with a desirable environment.
- Q&A
 - Effects on parking with more people back on campus – yes, it's always a problem. He is concerned about this and thinking through options.
 - Space on campus and other campuses, including SOM Greenville, is being looked at.
 - Deans/Heads will have the authority to make decisions, but HR will need to make sure that different rules are not being followed.
 - Flexible schedules will still be allowed (ex: daycare, plumber, etc.)
 - Extended commutes may take a toll and then it will be up to the individual to decide whether or not they will continue working here or not.
 - What are examples of unique skillsets? (example: statistical analysis)
 - The state asked for a list of individuals working outside of the state, but he does not know what other SC universities are doing.
 - Staff expressed disagreement with the statement that it is a community issue. In fact, moving people on campus will not increase the connection even in one college, for example, since they're spread out over multiple buildings.
 - Staff expressed that we have had demonstrated success in this hybrid environment (as he highlighted earlier) and this blanket decision seems to negate all of that.
 - This does not affect medical condition agreements.
 - He is not willing to share data because it becomes personally identifiable.
 - Yes, it was bad timing about the Modern Think survey closing. He hopes to do something similar in the fall to see the difference.
 - Staff questioned why it is a blanket initiative when some areas have actually improved outcomes?
 - Staff well-being doesn't seem to be a consideration here. The opportunity to work remotely was talked about to address staff well-being in the past and some staff felt like this decision seems to be punitive.
 - He is not concerned about attrition or extra duties.
 - If staff do take on extra duties, they should work with their supervisor to get compensation for those duties
 - He was not in the position to answer questions about the details, such as more flexibility over academic breaks when students and faculty are not here. He says the details will be worked out with HR over the coming months.

Reports of Committees:

- *Note: Committee Reports were provided in writing in advance of the meeting due to time constraints during the meeting.*

Membership: Kathryn Kenard/Andrea Avant

- Completed nominations process for upcoming elections
- There has been confusion as it relates to how Academic Advisors have been classified by the University and which ballots those names will appear. Academic Advisors can be nominated for staff senate, but their names will not appear on the unit/division in which they work; their names will appear on the ballots for the Provost office.
- Currently we have one unit/division that does not have enough nominations according to the Bylaws. Co-chairs will communicate with the current senators in that area.
- General Elections Timeline
 - April 14: Election Opens
 - April 28: Election Closes

Communications: Michaela Taylor/Lori Carey

- No report at this time.

Staff Policy and Well-Being: Jason Cone/Cami Reid

- RGP Grievance Process Transparency
 - Molly Peirano referenced CR 1.00 – applies to all USC community members – very broad scope, which includes RGPs
 - The Title IX and Civil Rights Office will work with RGP employees to identify options and, with the university's Research Office, will notify the appropriate federal agencies.
 - Next steps: How can we help with transparency for RGPs? Can this be updated on the offer letters?
- Employee Well-Being
 - Lactation Spaces are back on the university's website
- Email access for post docs
 - Gathering support from Faculty Senate, MCEC, Research, Public Health to find solutions, perhaps a forwarding system to avoid confusion with affiliate statuses
 - Reaching out to Coastal and Clemson to see how they handle this
 - After receiving feedback from in-state peer institutions pivot has been made to enable an autoreply upon departure with alternate contact information (should help with concerns about missed communication for ongoing research projects)
- Mental Health Spaces (AKA Wellness Spaces)
 - Cami & Megan met with Director of Campus Rec, Jim Walczyk, to discuss options of mental health spaces in his areas for fac/staff
 - Jim is open to identifying space(s) in Blatt and/or Wellness & Fitness Center
 - Jim has experience with these types of spaces and has a colleague, John, who designs them nationwide that is coming to campus soon
 - Megan & Cami will meet with Jim and John
- Blatt Pool for staff/faculty use
 - Contacting the aquatics director to see if there are opportunities for staff to utilize Blatt, perhaps identifying certain times each week for staff/faculty only
- Continuing Education

- Have connected with Hilary Brannon, Continuing Education Director, and next step is to meet with Shannon Means in the Provost Office to discuss options
- After Megan Colascione was able to meet with Shannon Means it has been communicated there will be no funding available to support staff with continuing education from the Provost's Office
- Hilary Brannon (Continuing Education Director) was able to have their area added to the Development's website to have donation as option (down the road the hope is to have scholarships offered)

Professional Development: Khristina DeLorenzo/Simone Keller

- No report at this time.

Community Projects: Chakira Hogan/Alexis Watts

- We have a [sign up link](#) with all volunteer opportunities through summer.
- Here are volunteer dates:
 - **Wednesday, April 23** – Cocky's Reading Express at Harbison West Elementary
 - **Friday, April 25** – Garden volunteer at campus Sustainable Carolina Garden
 - **Saturday, May 17** – Keep the Midlands Beautiful Street Cleanup
 - **All hands on deck to help with Staff Appreciation Day on **May 22!****
 - **Wednesday, May 28** – Ronald McDonald House Tab Donation followed by time to make a meal for families at the house

Bylaws: Marissa Buck/Manda Fontenot-Tuk

- Discussed the idea of adding Immediate Past Treasurer as an officer position
- Discussed changing Staff Awards and Recognition Committee name

Staff Senate Awards and Recognition Committee: Ashley Dantzer

- Save the Date for Staff Appreciation Day: May 22 (11 AM – 2 PM)
 - Location: Russell House Davis Field
 - Updates:
 - Finalizing details
 - Planned an initial walk-through of Davis Field with Russell House staff and Aramark staff
 - Finalized the winner of the staff t-shirt/tote bag contest
 - Please sign up for day-of assistance using [this form](#)

Staff Senate Scholarship/Fundraising Committee: Michelle Knight

- Actively seeking donation items for silent auction
- Have a letter we can share if you know of someone/business that may donate

Order of Business – Julia Bellon, *Parliamentarian*

- Bylaws Update
 - First Read
 - Change committee name from Awards and Recognition Committee to Staff Appreciation and Recognition Committee
 - Also change their purpose to “plan and implement the annual Staff Appreciation Day” – removing mention of awards

Additional Announcements

- Give 4 Garnet earned over \$1.5 million
- Equestrian Team won first ever SEC Championship

Adjourn

Senator McCormick made a motion to adjourn. Senator Harmon seconded the motion to adjourn. All senators were in favor. The formal meeting adjourned at 4:22 PM.

Next meeting: Tuesday, May 13 at 3:00 p.m. in the Lumpkin Auditorium, Close-Hipp Building, 8th Floor.

Respectfully Submitted,

Julia Hodge
Secretary
Staff Senate