

## Staff Senate

### Monthly Meeting Agenda

November 13, 2024, 12:00 pm

In-Person/Hybrid

Facilitator: Detric Robinson

Invited attendees: Ruth Brown, Coordinator of Business and Finance  
John Miller, IV, Associate Director for Black Community Initiatives

Minutes: Ross Logan

#### Agenda

12:00 Call to Session (Detric)

Role called.

12:05 Nutrition & Holistic Wellbeing Coaching program (Ruth Brown)

During the meeting, Ruth Brown, the nutrition and coordinator for business and finance, discussed the nutrition and holistic well-being coaching program available to faculty and staff. The program offers one-on-one coaching, seminars, body composition assessments, group fitness classes, and department well-being events. Ruth also mentioned the possibility of expanding the program's reach and encouraged staff to share information with their departments.

12:25 Black Community Initiatives (John Miller, IV)

John Miller IV, the associate director of Black Community initiatives at Du, who shared information about the Black Community initiatives and invited questions. He discussed the mission and history of BCI, a 3-year-old organization aimed at supporting and providing resources to address the lived experiences of black community members at DU. The organization has three pillars: healing and thriving, community engagement, and capacity building. John also highlighted the importance of understanding and respecting black identity, and the need for more conversations and resources to help students and staff navigate social dynamics and cultural differences. The organization has faced financial challenges and has had to reconceptualize its programming. John encouraged staff to ask about the impact of decisions on black communities and to join conversations about how to better support and involve black communities.

12:50 Break

1:00 Faculty-Staff Relations Workgroup (Detric)

The meeting primarily focused on the need for intentionality and commitment to stay on track. The team also discussed the importance of improving faculty-staff relations and the potential for joint programming. The idea of establishing a faculty and staff lounge was also brought up. An update

on the progress of the Staff Senate was also given, including their representation on multiple university-level committees and work groups. The team also discussed their plans to meet with the Faculty Senate and Graduate Student Government.

#### 1:05 Executive Committee updates

The meeting touched on the upcoming elections for the executive committee, with the decision to delay voting due to a lack of interest.

#### 1:10 Town Hall debrief

The team discussed their initial thoughts and perceptions of a recent town hall meeting. They agreed that the meeting could have gone better and identified some areas for improvement. They also discussed the feedback they provided, particularly regarding compensation. The team agreed that the town hall's focus on minor issues, such as the number of P cards and snacks, was condescending and not impactful. They also expressed concerns about the university's endowment (if it was doing well, why wasn't excess funds from that being used to help offset the deficit) and the lack of transparency in the decision-making process. The team concluded that the disintegration of culture was at the root of many issues and that the town hall meeting did not help to address this. They also expressed a lack of trust in the communication process. (Full notes attached below the minutes)

#### 1:40 Elections updates

#### 1:50 Committee & Liaison Updates

The Elections Committee is currently holding special elections to fill vacant seats for areas 2, 4, and 5. A drafted Elections Code will be posted in Teams for feedback and submitted for Staff Senate approval at the December meeting.

The Communications Committee is working towards several of the key initiatives outlined in the bylaws and the strategic plan. We will begin a thorough review of the website and its' content and layout in December, and are working to have the first quarterly newsletter put out in the first quarter of 2025. We also plan to continue to review standards for communication across all 9 Areas, and are supporting the At Large Senators as they begin work on hosting town halls.

For FY25, UBAP has been reorganized to progress on strategic initiatives while aligning with Staff Senate's goals. The chairs, Abigail Girard and Jason Jackson, will act as both leads and "floaters," attending quarterly subcommittee meetings rather than every session. To evenly distribute workload, UBAP is forming a Legislative Working Group with representatives from each subcommittee to draft resolutions more collaboratively.

#### 2:00 Adjourn Session (Detric)

#### **Action Items**

- Reflect on the Town Hall
- Self-Nominate or Nominate a senator for Treasurer and Secretary positions

## Town Hall Notes

### Perception of Leadership and Priorities

- Leadership is seen as focusing on trivial matters (e.g., cards, snacks) rather than addressing substantial concerns.
- There's frustration that upper administration isn't sharing the burden during challenging times, unlike during COVID when leadership took salary cuts.
- A disconnect is felt between leadership and staff, with staff perceiving directives as condescending and lacking collaboration.
- Concerns about leadership focusing on initiatives like the Kennedy Mountain Campus and Princeton rankings, while core needs remain unmet.
- Leadership's emphasis on budget cuts seems misaligned with hiring for high-salary positions (e.g., deputy chief at \$110K/year).

### Transparency and Communication Issues

- Communications during the town hall were perceived as lacking trustworthiness and empathy.
- Staff feel uninformed or misled about critical issues like layoffs and budget cuts.
- A perception exists that decisions are reactive and inconsistent, creating a sense of instability.

### Budget Cuts and Financial Practices

- Concerns about excessive focus on minor cost-saving measures (e.g., restricting flowers for celebrations) while major expenditures, like endowment spending, aren't prioritized.
- Staff feel budget cuts disproportionately impact vulnerable groups, including marginalized students and lower-level employees.
- Staff question decision-making processes and financial forecasting, particularly in light of known enrollment challenges.

### Morale, Culture, and Workplace Climate

- There's a strong sense of disconnection, loss of belonging, and declining morale over recent years.
- Celebrations for retirements or life milestones are seen as vital for morale but are now restricted.
- Fear is pervasive, with staff feeling at risk if they speak out, creating a toxic environment.

### Equity and Inclusion Concerns

- Budget cuts are perceived to disproportionately harm students with marginalized identities, conflicting with stated DEI commitments.
- Leadership comments, such as "thinking about diversity more broadly," feel dismissive of DEI investments.
- Events like fundraising and homecoming are viewed as exclusive and not reflective of diverse communities.

### Operational Challenges

- Constant restructuring and unclear direction make it hard for staff to perform their jobs effectively.
- Flexible work policies feel performative, with staff worried about layoffs if they deviate from in-person norms.
- Budget constraints leave departments expected to maintain operations with fewer resources.

### **Trust and Collective Power**

- Staff believe collective action, like bargaining, could help address systemic issues.
- There's a desire for greater solidarity and unified decision-making across departments.
- Instances of collaboration, such as working with faculty to protect vulnerable groups, show potential for positive outcomes when trust is present.

### **Calls for Specific Actions**

- Revisit endowment spending to address immediate challenges.
- Provide better training and support for mid-level leaders tasked with making difficult decisions.
- Consult external auditors to assess the university's financial situation independently.
- Address broken relationships with Indigenous groups as part of broader accountability and budgetary reflexivity.

### **Highlighted Quotes and Reactions**

- *"It doesn't feel like we are all in this together like during COVID times."* [Staff member]
- *"This is bullshit."* [Staff member]
- *"We are going to follow the political climate of the country to determine the level of DEI we are going to use."* [The Chancellor's response to a question regarding DEI funding and budget.]