

## University Staff Advisory Council

*Board of Trust Address, Spring 2022*

Good afternoon,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the University Staff Advisory Council, also known as USAC. My name is Tiffany Lawrence Givens, and I am the current USAC president. I have been at Vanderbilt for almost five years, and I am a Senior Administrative Manager in the School of Medicine Basic Sciences. I am delighted to be with you in person after two years of meetings via Zoom.

As you may remember from last year, I took office early giving me the distinct honor of meeting with you twice. Since we last met, USAC has moved forward several initiatives and created opportunities to build community amongst the staff. During our time together today, I will briefly recap fiscal year 2022. I am happy to answer questions at the end.

First, I want to remind you of what we do and who we are. We act as an advisory group to the university, focused on issues that affect Vanderbilt and those served by the Council. We work across the university's administration and staff community to resolve problems, develop policies and advance best practices for staff. As a result of the reapportionment in FY21, we are now comprised of 96 voting members across 19 groups, which represent all areas of staff, both exempt and non-exempt, in non-union roles throughout the university.

This year, an unusually high number of representatives have stepped down from their role leaving unfilled positions and creating challenges for the council. We currently have 18 vacancies, representing 19% of our council membership. Right now, we are in our normal election process, and we are also holding off-cycle elections to fill vacancies. We hope to have a full council at the start of the new fiscal year. While this turnover keeps our membership committee busy, we have not let challenges stop us from doing great work.

As of July 1, 2021, USAC has six committees: Communications, Equity Diversity and Inclusion, Events, Membership, Rules and Administration and Staff Life. In addition to two co-chairs for each committee, our officers include our Treasurer, Secretary, Vice President/ President Elect and President.

Allow me to highlight the accomplishments of our more active committees.

Our **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee** collaborates closely with Dr. Churchwell and his team on the Heritage Calendar project, which highlights an individual, day or religion each month with visual posters around campus and online. Most recently, this has

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included Ramadan, Women's History Month, Black History Month and Three Kings Day. They are also working on initiatives to increase inclusion for staff at the university.

Our **Events** Committee has been hard at work fostering community through activities such as our monthly virtual coffee break, which we were able to have in person yesterday at Starbucks. They also hosted a lunch and lacrosse event where staff were encouraged to attend the game and USAC supplied lunch. I want to pause here to say thank you for providing USAC with a budget making it possible for us to host events that build community and show appreciation. The committee also coordinates volunteer opportunities for staff and their families such as working with One Generation Away on drive-thru food distributions at Fort Negley. We continued our annual Spread the Love event virtually, which raises funds for Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle TN. This spring, we raised \$1,290, which provided over 5,100 meals for Tennessee families in need.

Our **Staff Life** Committee finalized and submitted their Parental Leave proposal, which received approval from the council and was submitted to university leadership in October 2021. In the proposal, we advocate for sixteen weeks of parental leave at full pay, clear and concise communication of Vanderbilt's policy and a culture of support for staff who utilize this benefit. Additionally, the committee realized there are areas of concern that need to be addressed that do not warrant a formal proposal. Based on this, they created a Summary of Issues, which is a document outlining areas where staff have concerns. To date, there have been two summary of issues, one for Parking and the other related to Staff Tuition Benefits, specifically Ed Assist, a third party vendor used by the university. Each summary was submitted to the correct contact person to address the items, and our feedback was received with appreciation. This is one example of how USAC is moving away from a siloed approach and leaning into radical collaboration. In response to the December 2020 USAC Proposal on Professional Development and Staff Engagement, members of the committee continue to meet regularly with the Employee Learning and Engagement team to review professional development initiatives that are in place and in development.

In addition to the work of our committees, USAC continues to support the Employee Hardship Fund, which is available to any full-time employee who is experiencing a temporary hardship. The fund is administered by EAP/Work Life Connections housed at VUMC. The Kroger's Community Rewards program connects Kroger cards to the Vanderbilt Employee Assistance account, and a portion of purchases go to the fund. This is an excellent resource

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for the many staff in need. Unfortunately, through the rewards program, we raised less than \$700 so far, this fiscal year.

In response, our Events committee saw the need to raise funds in other ways. They coordinated Jingle in July and Holiday Jingle, which raised over \$1,750 combined. In May, our fundraiser is Donate on the Date, where one identifies a date and donates that amount. For example, my wedding anniversary is May 13, so I would donate \$13 on the 13<sup>th</sup>. As long as there is a need, we will continue to find creative ways to raise money for the employee hardship fund.

This year, most of our meetings were held via Zoom, and we had notable speakers such as Coach Stackhouse, Provost Raver and earlier this month Chancellor Diermeier to name a few.

In a typical year, we take two opportunities to celebrate our work as well as one another at our December and June meetings. Fortunately, we were able to meet in person in December and celebrate the mid-point of the fiscal year and holiday season. Our June 2022 meeting will also be in person as a celebration of the end of the fiscal year, to present our annual awards and turn over the USAC reigns to the new executive leadership.

This has not been an easy year for staff. Fortunately, USAC has been able to accomplish much due to the talented and engaged staff who volunteer their time. We are also lucky to have the support of administration. When I agreed to be USAC Vice President/President Elect well over two years ago, I had no idea how challenging, memorable and rewarding this experience would be. I am proud of all we have accomplished, and I remain confident in the ability of USAC to make a difference in the lives of our staff members. Looking to the future, we are eager for continued collaborations with a focus on community and staff engagement.

In closing, I want to take a moment to thank Chancellor Diermeier. In the Chancellor's first year, he made staff a priority by establishing traditions such as the staff assemblies, allowing for reflection, honoring colleagues and celebrating. I am pleased this commitment to staff did not waiver in year two as we had continued opportunities to come together as one Vanderbilt and recognize staff including the staff assemblies, staff awards, the Chancellor's Recognition Award and investiture. Thank you, Chancellor Diermeier!

On behalf of the over 4,000 University staff members represented by USAC, I thank you **all** for your guidance and support as we **dare to grow**.