

NMSU Employee Council
Employee Council Meeting Minutes
May 13, 2021

Attendees:

Executive Council: Joseph Almaguer (Chair-V), Letty Gallegos (Past-Chair-A), Sandra Lujan (Secretary/Treasurer-A), Dacia Sedillo (Recording Secretary-V), Gary Bond (Web Master-V)
Voting members - Cynthia Pelak, Erin Wahl, Gaylene Fasenko, Humberto Morales, Hwiman Chung, Kathy Landers, Lucinda Banegas-Carreon, Luis Velasco, Marisela Marquez, Marissa Fowler, Monica Dunivan, Nicole Sack, Polly Wagner, Rosa de la Torre-Burmeister,
Alternate members – Jamie Bronstein (alternate for Kim Allbright), Julie Correa, Krystal Espinoza, Seth Miner, Vandeen McKenzie (alternate for Karena Pirtle)

Absent:

Executive Council: Susanne Berger (Chair-Elect-A),
Voting members – Cortney Castle-Chavez, Karena Pirtle (alternate Vandeen McKenzie), Karla Volpi, Kim Allbright (alternate Jamie Bronstein),
Alternate members - Jagdish Khubchandani, Randi Bolding, Ryan Armendariz, Sandra McKay,

1. Call to order 3:33 p.m. by Joseph Almaguer, Chair
2. Welcome guests
Celeste Martinez, Kaili Howard, Danois Montoya, David Chavez, Christina Schaub
3. Roll Call
4. Confirmation of Quorum (19 of 21 voting members represented)
5. Approval of April minutes
Motion: Gaylene Fasenko
Second: Marisela Marquez
Motion was approved.
6. Benefits Update – Celeste Martinez
The voluntary retirement incentive program is being finalized through June 30, 2021. Training central is holding sessions for employees who are planning to retire.
HR has been working with ICT to upgrade the online waiver request form. For summer, Summer staff and spouse will open May 16th. Dependent waivers and NMSU-Online enrollments are targeted to go-live May 24th. Retirees will have to continue submitting paper forms, at least, for summer. As a reminder, the dependent tuition waiver is one-half of the in-state tuition rate for dependents under 25 years of age at census. This waiver does not apply if students are on the Lottery scholarship or other tuition scholarships. You can see the details of this benefit, and all others at <https://benefits.nmsu.edu>. Previous insurance rate sheets can also be found on that webpage.
7. Aggie Fit – Danois Montoya
Danny provided a history of Aggie Fit, which was created in 2009 and had not seen a rate increase since inception. Last year, Danny responded to an upper administration request for comparative rates with local gyms and an analysis of current costs of running the Activity and Aquatic Centers. Danny shared that spreadsheet with the group. He also reminded the group

that the aquatic center is the only Olympic size pool in the area. He explained that, the both Centers are classified as auxiliary functions and are, therefore, not funded by the State/I&G funds. The University was not supplementing the budget prior to Aggie Fit. Students were simply bearing the full cost of the Centers' operations.

Commentary regarding the recent rate increase centered around concerns that employees had no options but to pay the higher rate, because they had signed a contract. Danny refuted this statement and informed the group that all Aggie Fit contracts had been cancelled at the time of the rate increase, and employees had to inform his staff that they wanted to participate and sign a new contract. In addition, no Aggie Fit memberships were charged during the pandemic (March 1, 2020 to March 30, 2021). In normal years, the annual disenrollment period is May 1 – May 15.

Nicole and Celeste pointed out that gym membership/Aggie Fit is not an entitlement benefit. It is an option, available to all employees, but is not required. Some employees find it convenient and utilize it and others choose not to. It is not comparable to parking stickers where employees have to buy the permit or something "bad" happens (parking tickets or less convenient parking options).

A suggestion arose that employees might participate in Aggie Fit, and feel more comfortable using the facilities, if there were a few hours designated as employee only use. Danny indicated he liked that idea and would take it back to his leadership for consideration.

Discussion broadened to the more extensive topic of employee benefits and the recommendation was made that this be taken up by the ad-hoc Employee Council Benefits Committee. But some points of clarification/correction, provided by Celeste, included:

- A staff compensation plan review is just getting underway
- The State and some of the medical insurance providers include local gym memberships in their packages, in addition to the Aggie Fit option
- NMSU does provide eligible retirees with medical insurance, if employee has 10 years of consecutive enrollment prior to retirement. This 10-year rule is part of the NMSU policy and the Blue Cross/Blue Shield contract and has been in place since, at least, the late 1980s.
- Annual leave carryforward is capped at 240 hours as of June 30
- Sick leave is capped at 800 hours

8. Legislative Debrief – Ricardo Rel

Tabled, Government Relations was not available to attend.

9. Event Committee – Employee Picnic

President Floros has approved the preparation to begin for an on-campus Employee Appreciation Picnic to be held in October, however the budget is unknown at this time. A call was made for committee members: Marissa Fowler, Marisela Marquez and Krystal Espinoza volunteered.

The question was raised as to whether a picnic is something employees want. Other options were mentioned such as movie nights, with family invited. Joseph suggested yoga events around campus, but Letty suggested "stretching" or something more relaxed that doesn't imply a change of clothes or special equipment is needed.

Marissa recommended we survey employees. One question to ask: post-COVID, how do we want to gather / support and be supported by our leaders and colleagues?

10. Summer Meetings

Joseph proposed that June and July meeting only be held if urgent matters arise. Cynthia Pelak moved to approve, Marissa Fowler seconded the motion. Motion was approved.

11. Committee Reports

Climate Action Team (CAT) – Rosa de la Torre-Burrmeister
Last meeting was May 5th. Current focus is the development of three sub-committees to continue the work started by the now disbanded Climate Survey Action Team.

Diversity Council – Vandeen McKenzie

Last meeting was yesterday [May 12th]. New chair is Laura Madsen, Chair-elect is Laura Castille. New VP for Equity, Inclusion and Diversity will start on August 1, but is already meeting with diversity office staff.

The Council reached out to General Counsel to understand the administration's denial of a request that NMSU designate itself as a sanctuary campus. That designation has political ramifications tied to federal funding, but it is important for faculty, staff and students to understand that NMSU is taking all the actions (or inactions) of a sanctuary campus.

Benefits Review – Rosa de la Torre-Burrmeister

EC ad-hoc committee met May 12th. She provided the members with the CSAT benefits comparison from peer institutions and the committee decided to spend the summer developing three (3) priorities to present to Employee Council in the fall. Council members suggested considering alternative benefits, such as different types of parking passes now that more employees will be on alternative work arrangements.

Others – no reports

12. Other business

A question was raised as to whether Employee Council should issue a statement to advocate for COVID vaccination requirements for employees and students. After discussion, it was determined that the Council should consider what our response will be to an administrative decision that is currently pending. While many of us are vax advocates, there is a political and personal balance to be considered. It was noted that the University is holding vax clinics throughout campus, and will continue/increase those efforts at the start of the fall semester.

13. No announcements

14. Adjournment 4:08 p.m. by Joseph Almaguer, Chair

Next Meeting: Thursday, August 12, 2021 @ 2:30