

NMSU Employee Council
Employee Council Meeting Minutes
August 12, 2021

Attendees:

Executive Council: Joseph Almaguer (Chair-V), Letty Gallegos (Past-Chair-A), Susanne Berger (Chair-Elect-A), Sandra Lujan (Secretary/Treasurer-A), Dacia Sedillo (Recording Secretary-V), Gary Bond (Web Master-V)

Voting members - Cortney Castle-Chavez, Erin Wahl, Gaylene Fassenko, Humberto Morales, Karena Pirtle, Lucinda Banegas-Carreon, Marisela Marquez, Marissa Fowler, Nicole Sack, Polly Wagner, Rosa de la Torre-Burmeister,

Alternate members – Jamie Bronstein (alternate for Kim Allbright), Julie Correa, Krystal Espinoza, Sandra McKay, Seth Miner, Vandeen McKenzie

Absent:

Executive Council:

Voting members – Cynthia Pelak, Hwiman Chung, Karla Volpi, Kathy Landers, Kim Allbright (alternate Jamie Bronstein), Luis Velasco, Monica Dunivan,

Alternate members - Jagdish Khubchandani, Randi Bolding, Ryan Armendariz,

1. Call to order 2:32 p.m. by Joseph Almaguer, Chair
2. Welcome guests:
Celeste Martinez, Linda Scholz
3. Roll Call
4. Confirmation of Quorum (16 of 21 voting members represented)
5. Approval of May minutes
Motion: Cortney Castle-Chavez
Second: Lucinda Banegas-Carreon
Motion was approved
6. Benefits Update – Celeste Martinez
Benefits staff are preparing for open enrollment, which will occur in October. Benefit eligible employees can opt in or make changes to their insurance coverage during that time frame. Rates did not increase, but plans may change. Additional providers will be available. Working on a new method for submitting changes, and it may be online but not guaranteed. The old method lives on a server that is being decommissioned, so an immediate change was necessary. Benefits will be hosting information sessions. The State of NM will also be providing information sessions with the vendors. Sessions will be recorded and posted on the Benefits website. FAQs will also be available on that website. Individual offices can request a special session for their staff. Celeste asked if and how Employee Council can assist with getting the word out to all employees. Suggestions included sending out a text, which may not be feasible, but physical mail was not recommended for most.
A 16-week evidence based program for Diabetes Prevention will be piloted soon. Watch for more information on this.
The staff are currently working, with Mercer, on a gap analysis of voluntary benefits. Information on current voluntary and other benefits can be found on the Benefits website. Specific company discounts (i.e. Sodexo) are listed on the website, but Benefits/NMSU does not control or negotiate those.
The tuition waiver for dependents and staff/spouse is open. UO campus still has to use paper forms. Reminder that part-time and graduate dependent tuition is taxable at 35%, and the waiver could impact financial and and/or scholarship eligibility.

7. Event Committee – Employee Picnic: Marisela Marquez
Tentative date of October 19th. Budget same as 2019 (\$25k). Committee is currently gathering quotes from on and off-campus vendors. Committee will begin meeting more frequently and will share updates in the EC Teams channel.

8. VP for Equity, Inclusion and Diversity: Dr. Linda Scholz
Dr. Scholz introduced herself and asked for feedback, from the group, on the issues of diversity, equity and inclusion at NMSU. Her vision and initiatives will be focused around answering questions such as: What are our values and what do they look like in action? What does inclusion look like? What do we do to be inclusive?
She asked for ideas on how she can partner with EC. A long discussion ensued, in which points raised by EC members included:
 - Diversification of curriculum
 - Conduct searches rather than appointments, especially in leadership positions
 - Faculty compensation committee finding of discrepancies in compensation for women and people of color
 - Recent survey results and follow-up efforts, or lack thereof
 - Trust and communication continues to be an issue, but CAT is addressing with Executive Team. Dr. Scholz asked for more information on this issue. EC indicated people want to know “how decisions are made” and “don’t like to be surprised”. There is a lack of transparency. Specific examples were shared. The issue is not just top-down communication, but a lack of multi-direction communication.
 - Multiple turnovers in administration and failure to recognize or listen to historical knowledge that exists among the faculty and staff
 - Concern that existing a few BIPOC employees are being asked to serve on multiple committees, as representatives of diverse views and perspectives, while students and colleagues may also seek them out as mentors and advisors. Dr. Scholz referred to this as “emotional labor” and acknowledged the burden that work can place on individuals, in excess of their regular work/life load.
 - Don’t forget the disabled faculty, staff and students when discussing inclusion, equity and diversity issues, solutions, and initiatives.

Dr. Scholz specifically asked how we, as employees, and the institution, as a whole, support undocumented students. Most EC members indicated we do a good job of understanding and supporting that population, given our border location and long history of serving those students and their families. There was a conversation around ensuring the “Dreamers” training continues, since the long-time Director of Chicano Programs retired during the pandemic. There was also a hope expressed that the Dreamers training, and other diversity/awareness trainings such as the ones MVP and LGBTQ programs offer, could become a requirement of being an NMSU employee.

9. Committee Reports
Climate Action Team (CAT): Rosa de la Torre-Burmeister
Met August 11th to discuss ice cream social / welcome back event for employee appreciation. The CAT has been partnering with many campus groups on this event, including Employee Council leadership.

August 25th meeting with the Executive Team for the purpose of discussing the CATs memo on Trust and Communication. Specific items to be addressed will include lack of clarity at Town Halls and the missing involvement of Deans and Department Heads in the dissemination of information and decisions.

A separate memo requesting an increase of two days to the compassionate leave policy was submitted to the Executive Team.

The VP for Inclusion, Equity and Diversity will be joining CAT at future meetings.

Diversity Council: Vandeen McKenzie

No update

Benefits Review:

No update

Others: No reports

10. Announcements

Joseph informed the Council of a meeting he had with Vice Provost Sherry Kollmann (Digital Learning Initiatives), regarding opportunities for staff to access more online classes. Options being explored include certificate programs, rather than full degree programs.

Current issue is lack of local qualified faculty to offer more classes. Sandra Lujan shared that she is working with the DLI team to create open postings for online adjunct instructors as a solution to that problem.

Members indicated the problem may not only be lack of class/seat availability, but lack of supervisor flexibility in allowing staff to take advantage of the free class benefit for classes offered during regular business hours.

Rosa reminded the group that, historically, NMSU had a Weekend College and DACC offers continuing education classes, as well.

11. Adjournment 4:04 p.m. by Joseph Almaguer, Chair

Next meeting: September 9, 2021 at 2:30 p.m.

PARKING LOT:

Status of HR's "Best Places to Work" survey