

academic affairs & research ERC

MEETING MINUTES

wednesday, APRIL 14, 2021 | 1:30 – 3:00 P.M.

VIA ZOOM

PRESENT

Katie Bookout, Jessica Cantu, Tom Cruise (Guest Speaker), Darrell Easley, Jenn Edwards, Jennifer Horner, Gennie Hope-Davian, Amy Gregory, Jennifer Horner, Boone Huffaker, Cathy Jenkins, Renee Johnson, Olivia Kelley, Diane Kelly, Shelly Payne, Mia Pearson-Loomis, Julie Roe, Chrisanne Romeo, Jen Scagnelli, Elizabeth Tampas-Dixon, Renee Thomas, Lisa Vandergriff, Lindsi Whittaker, Chrissy Wills-Maples, Carrie Zitzman

ABSENT

Melissa Cox, Mary Lucal, Cindy Satterfield, Sonja Spell, Teresa Volkodav-Crabtree

1. WELCOME

Julie Roe, Sr. Employee Relations Consultant, welcomed the group to the March meeting.

1. UPDATES
   1. Office of Research & Engagement Update – Renee Thomas, Interim Budget Director for Research Finance & Administration

Renee Thomas greeted the group and shared that the Office of Research is working on projects, and will update the group at the May meeting.

* 1. Human Resources Update – Dr. Darrell Easley, Director of Employee Relations & Learning & Organizational Development

Dr. Darrell Easley greeted the group and began his update by mentioning annual performance reviews. He reminded the group that reviews were to be done by March 31. If any representatives or constituents have not yet received their reviews they may want to talk with their supervisors.

Dr. Easley next shared several HR announcements including Sick Leave Bank open enrollment. The enrollment period runs through June 30, and the Employee Relations team recently held a webinar about the Bank on April 1.

Dr. Easley closed by discussing the recent email from Chancellor Plowman about return to campus. He said there are many questions around plans to return and HR has a team working on guidelines to help guide us through the transition. Cathy Jenkins asked if staff who want to continue working from home should talk with their supervisor or HR. Dr. Easley responded that HR has created a tool to help supervisors determine if a job could be done remotely. Employees may also request ADA accommodation related to working remotely.

Jennifer Horner asked if UConnecT program’s requirement of letters of recommendation. Dr. Easley responded that the application packet should include the letters and any other supporting documents. UConnect is a yearlong cohort program, and Ms. Roe shared her experience participating in UTILA, the related exempt staff program.

1. GUEST SPEAKERS
   1. Veterans Success Center & Green Zone Training – Tom Cruise, VSC Coordinator

Tom Cruise, Veterans Success Center Coordinator, greeted the group and highlighted an upcoming Green Zone Training, also known as military cultural competency training. He noted that his presentation to the group was adapted from Green Zone Training information.

Mr. Cruise began his presentation by introducing himself as a coordinator and school certifying official with the [Veterans Success Center (VSC)](https://veterans.utk.edu/), previously known as the Veterans Resource Center. The VSC facilitates Volunteer veteran and military affiliated transitions and their foundational philosophy is to serve those who have served. VSC staff are advocates for veterans on campus and works to ensure they have a successful experience. The VSC can additionally assist with a variety of services including priority registration, fee deferment, and translating military skills to college credit to make transitioning to student life as smooth as possible for student veterans.

Mr. Cruise explained that veteran students are a very diverse group of people from all different branches of the military who range in age, gender, and service in different times of war and peace (combat and non-combat veterans). In addition, veteran students have a range of various skills, occupations, and goals that they bring to the campus community. The average age for undergraduate student veterans is 28 and graduate is 36. Most are enrolled in the College of Arts & Sciences for undergraduate studies and the Haslam College of Business (HCB) for graduate studies. The VSC has a [Yellow Ribbon Program](https://veterans.utk.edu/about-the-yellow-ribbon-program/) designation for graduate programs in Business and the College of Social Work.

Mr. Cruise then discussed education benefits on campus. The most common is [Chapter 33 (Post 9/11 GI Bill)](https://www.va.gov/education/about-gi-bill-benefits/post-9-11/) benefit, which covers in-state tuition and fees, provides a monthly stipend and book stipend. The [Chapter 31 (Veteran Readiness and Employment) benefit](https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vocational-rehabilitation/) is similar to the Chapter 33 benefit but a veteran has to have at least a 10% disability rating from the Veterans Administration (VA) to receive this benefit. Other benefits include [Chapter 1606](https://www.va.gov/education/about-gi-bill-benefits/montgomery-selected-reserve/) and [Tennessee STRONG Act](https://veterans.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/44/2019/07/EDU_STRONG_application_packet_july19-3.pdf) benefits geared to National Guard and Reserve.

Mr. Cruise next discussed transition strengths for student veterans and what they bring to the classroom from their life experiences. He said faculty have talked about seeing leadership and motivation from student veterans as well as great time management and work ethics. The transition to becoming a student can also coincide with coming off of active duty and transitioning to both civilian life and student life. He shared those dual experiences can cause some veterans to have an issue adapting to campus culture.

Mr. Cruise then turned his focus to veteran employees, noting that there are currently approximately 150 self-identified veteran employees on campus. That number only includes veterans who self-identify and there could be other veterans among faculty and staff. UTPD and Facilities Services have the highest number of veteran employees on campus. Casey Bain, [Recruiting Business Partner](https://hr.utk.edu/staff/#custom-collapse-0-5) and HR Veterans Representative, is an advocate for veterans on campus. Mr. Cruise encouraged representatives who are veterans or want to reach out about veteran employment questions, to contact Mr. Bain or him for assistance.

Mr. Cruise welcomed the group to visit the Center, which is located on the first floor of Hodges Library next to One Stop. He said the VSC offers quiet study areas for veteran students, a lounge and kitchen, and donated school and personal supplies. The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) provides snack and drink donations to the Center.

Prior to the pandemic, the VSC offered onsite services including counseling, tutoring, and mentoring as well as career workshops with veteran friendly employers. They hope to begin to offer those services once again in the fall. He said they also hope to host Veterans Week campus community events and a dinner to bring together student, faculty, and staff veterans and those who support veterans. The VSC also hopes to create a “vet camp” veterans-only orientation before classes start this fall to orient new student veterans to campus.

The VSC is part of the Division of Student Success and partners with offices across campus including Student Disability Services, the Student Counseling Center and UTPD. They also partner with Parking Services to offer [Purple Heart parking](https://veterans.utk.edu/purple-heart-parking/), which allows student, faculty, and staff veterans who have received a Purple Heart to park in non-reserved areas on campus. The VSC also partners with UT Athletics and holds a “vets versus cadets” competition at a basketball game. And they also work with outreach work with [Human-Animal Bond in Tennessee (HABIT)](https://vetmed.tennessee.edu/outreach/habit/) to work with Shiloh, a [therapy dog that visits the Center](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJSLdprbq-Q). [VOLFighters](https://veterans.utk.edu/vol-fighters-ut-chapter-of-student-veterans-of-america/) and [SALUTE National Honor Society](https://veterans.utk.edu/salute-national-honor-society/) additionally both operate out of the VSC and the Center offers a challenge coin medallion for students upon graduation.

Additionally, they work closely with the with the [Veterans Pre-College Program](https://veterans.utk.edu/veterans-pre-college-program/), which provides various services to prospective student veterans like additional tutoring and supports needs outside of education like disability claims.

Mr. Cruise closed by noting that UTK has been named a [Military Friendly Gold School](https://news.utk.edu/2021/03/08/ut-named-military-friendly-school-achieves-gold-ranking/) for 2021. The campus has also been named a [Purple Heart designated university](https://www.utk.edu/history/ut-designated-purple-heart-university). He emphasized that Green Zone Training goes into more detail, and encouraged the group to consider signing up for the training. The two-hour training will take place on April 20 and covers educational benefits in more detail. Ms. Roe noted after she took the Green Zone training she picked up a sticker from the VSC to put on her door to indicate veteran friendliness. Mr. Cruise shared a veteran student’s experience with a staff member who also

Ms. Jenkins asked if the Purple Heart parking permit was available to faculty and staff or students only. Dr. Easley located information from Parking Services’ website that indicated the permit is available to students and employees.

1. CONSTITUENT QUESTIONS
   1. CAP Certification/Renewal Fees – Jennifer Horner

Q: Can Certified Administrative Professional (CAP) certification or renewal fees be paid for by employees’ departments? I recently needed to renew my certification. I understand that the UT Career Development Fund helps partially pay for the initial CAP test but it does not cover renewal fees.

A: Human Resources collaborated with Finance & Administration to research this question and confirmed that departments cannot pay for the CAP exam or re-certification fees. This is specifically because there is a corresponding one-time 9% salary increase upon initially passing the exam (HR0465 – Salary Increase for Passing Certified Administrative Professional Examination). That being said, Employee & Organizational Development’s UT Career Development Fund may reimburse up to $150 of the CAP exam fee. The fund is available to non-exempt UT employees only and is a one-time reimbursement.

Departments may pay for other (i.e. non-CAP) job-related certifications, as well as annual fees and recertifications, but employees should inquire to learn their department’s practices. Please note those payments may be taxable for the employee. Departments cannot pay for certifications that are required for the job, as well as certifications that are not related to their job.

1. OTHER BUSINESS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
   1. Sick Leave Bank Open Enrollment

Sick Leave Bank open enrollment is underway! We will be accepting applications for new enrollees for the Knoxville-area and Institute of Agriculture Sick Leave Banks through June 30. To be eligible, you must be employed as a regular UT employee, accruing sick leave, with a sick leave balance of at least 48 hours or 6 days (pro-rated for regular, part-time employees). Employees who meet those requirements who wish to join the Bank must complete an enrollment application and agree to donate 24 hours of sick leave to the bank. The 24-hour donation is non-refundable. Applications may be submitted to [SickLeaveBank@utk.edu](mailto:SickLeaveBank@utk.edu), and electronic signatures and scans are accepted. Current bank members do not need to reapply.

For more information and to download an enrollment application, visit <https://hr.utk.edu/sick-leave-bank/>.

Employee Relations recently hosted a Sick Leave Bank Information Session for employees interested in more information. The session was recorded and is viewable on our UTK HR YouTube Channel: <https://youtu.be/T8uV67XkMg0>.

* 1. Campus Vaccination Events

The University is hosting multiple UT employee and student COVID-19 vaccination events at the Student Health Center this week and next. These vaccination appointments are only open to UT students, faculty, and staff age 18 and older. A NetID and password are required to schedule an appointment and appointments must be made online. Employees may also be able to receive vaccine on a walk-in basis depending on each event’s capacity.

The University encourages all students, faculty, and staff to receive the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible. Our best chance of reducing the spread of COVID-19 when we return to campus is for the majority of our community to be vaccinated.

For more information including age and phase eligibility information and to view all available events, please visit: <https://www.utk.edu/coronavirus/vaccine/>.

* 1. UConnect 2021-22 Program: Applications Open April 19

Learning & Organizational Development in partnership with the Division of Diversity & Engagement will open applications soon for their 2021-22 program cohort.

UConnecT is an inclusive, yearlong immersive leadership and professional development program built around speakers from senior leadership, and practical leadership growth strategies. UConnecT is a carefully constructed rigorous learning experience for non-exempt staff who have no less than three years of continuous service as of August 3, 2021.

The application period begins April 19, 2021 and closes on May 21, 2021.

Learn more about UConnecT: <https://hr.utk.edu/uconnect/>

* 1. Identity Theft Awareness & Pandemic-Related Unemployment Fraud

Pandemic-related unemployment insurance claim fraud has been on the rise across the U.S. Fraudulent claims have been identified as being filed by scammers using stolen data from public data breaches (i.e. Equifax, Target, Hilton, Marriott, etc.). A number of colleges and universities across the country including the University of Tennessee have had employees affected by fraudulent claims filed using their personally identifiable information.

In 2020 our UTK HR Employee Relations team identified and responded to nearly two dozen fraudulent claims for Knoxville-area University employees. When a claim is identified as being fraudulent an Employee Relations team member will offer resources and support to help guide an affected employee through next steps for responding to identity theft.

Employees who receive information related to unemployment, and who did not file a claim for benefits, should contact UTK HR Employee Relations at 974-8299.

1. REMINDERS:
   1. Please email Jessica Cantu ([jlcantu@utk.edu](mailto:jlcantu@utk.edu)) any constituent questions.