

OPERATIONS ERC

Meeting AGENDA

TUESDAY, APRIL 6, 2021 | 1:30 – 3:00 P.M.

VIA ZOOM

PRESENT

Tom Anderson, Harold Bivens, Anthony Brown, Brian Browning, Jessica Cantu, Ted Coward, Tom Cruise (Guest Speaker), Darrell Easley, Paul Finley, Steven Henry, Terry Ledford, Sarah Hoel, William Iler, Debbie Lane, Mary Lucal, Chip Pennoyer, Gavin Ramsey, Ed Roach, Julie Roe, Lisa Turner, Dave Webb

ABSENT

Jason Baggett, Joseph Bray, Charles Burton, Jeremiah Cook, Judy Jones, Jimmy Large, Ethan Long, Raheem Obaid, Regina Olum, Debra Robinson, Thomas Spoon, Jake Turner

1. WELCOME

Julie Roe, Senior Employee Relations Specialist, welcomed the group to the April meeting.

1. UPDATES
   1. Finance and Administration Update – Brian Browning, Acting Associate Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration

Brian Browning greeted the group and began his update with bringing the group up to speed on the upcoming UT System offices relocation to downtown Knoxville. System will be moving into [UT Tower](https://offices.tennessee.edu/), formerly TVA Towers, with the first phase of the move to begin in August. He shared that nearly 60% of Andy Holt Tower will be vacant as a result of the move. The newly vacated spaces will fill back up as areas relocate to the Tower.

Mr. Browning closed by noting the budget entry process is underway, and financial areas of departments are busy as a result.

* 1. Human Resources Update – Mary Lucal, Associate Vice Chancellor of Human Resources

Dr. Mary Lucal began her update by touching on [performance reviews](https://hr.utk.edu/performance-evaluation/) and the new Online Performance Review (OPR) system. March 31 is the deadline for reviews, and she noted completions are going well. She noted that Probationary Reviews are next on the list to transition to being completed online, and expressed her gratitude to campus partners in OIT and the HR team for their work in building the OPR system. Employees outside of Facilities Services who have not yet had an online performance review should check with their supervisor or departmental leadership as completion reports will be going out to Vice Chancellors early next week.

Dr. Lucal next discussed the upcoming [Sick Leave Bank](https://hr.utk.edu/sick-leave-bank/) annual enrollment, which kicked off April 1. While last year’s enrollment period was extended due to the pandemic, this year’s period will run from April 1 through June 30. Dr. Lucal emphasized the importance of representatives talking with newer coworkers who may not be familiar with the Sick Leave Bank.

Dr. Lucal then touched on the [UConnecT program](https://hr.utk.edu/uconnect/), which provides a cohort of non-exempt employees an opportunity to enhance their inclusive leadership skills. The window for applications will open soon, and she encouraged anyone interested in applying to do so.

Dr. Lucal then reflected on Chancellor Plowman’s announcement around return to campus on June 1. She acknowledged that many of the representatives never left campus but, for others who did, this will mark a change in their working modality. HR will be working to support people as they figure out what return to campus will look like for themselves, their work and their departments. More information will be shared soon with the campus community about return to work guidance for employees and supervisors. Gavin Ramsey asked if there would be any changes in the current campus mask mandate. Dr. Lucal replied that will continue as long as the CDC and Tennessee Department of Health continue to provide guidance to mask. As guidance changes the campus will adapt just as we have over the last year. There may also be a change in the requirement to complete the daily self-check before coming to campus. Mr. Ramsey asked to confirm if the CDC changed social distancing guidelines for colleges as they recently did for K-12 grades. Dr. Lucal confirmed the change was made for school-aged children, but it does not include colleges.

Dr. Lucal closed by discussing the merit pool, and noted that final details will be coming from campus leadership. Mr. Browning confirmed that leadership are looking at several scenarios based on the Governor’s budget. He said part of the 4% salary pool was earmarked to be retroactive to January 1 with the other 2% allocated to be effective July 1. He confirmed they are looking to the State to determine what flexibility, if any, the University has in looking at the scenarios. Tom Anderson asked for clarification around the use of merit pool vs merit raise. Mr. Browning clarified that salary pool was most appropriate as no decisions have yet been made about how the pool monies will be allocated. Ed Roach asked if there was consideration for use of the salary pool to address employees who were not impacted by the new market based pay structure being implemented. Dr. Lucal confirmed there will be nothing else that is specifically associated with market compensation. It is possible some of those monies could be used by departments or units to make adjustments if there are gaps or compression issues. A discussion about pay, decision-making around salary pool dollars, and career ladders took place. Mr. Anderson said he would bring up Facilities Services’ pay concerns with President Boyd and the Employee Relations Advisory Board (ERAB).

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.

Dr. Lucal asked if a veteran employee who is taking classes would have any enhanced benefit beyond the regular employee educational assistance benefit. Mr. Cruise replied that the VSC can offer priority registration and fee deferment if needed. They can also assist them with GI Bill benefits, answer questions they may have, and the employee is welcome to visit and use the Center.

Mr. Anderson asked to confirm the VSC location. Mr. Cruise confirmed the Center is located on the ground floor of Hodges Library next to One Stop near the Melrose Avenue/Tyson Alumni House. The Center is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Mr. Roach asked about military service and retirement. Mr. Cruise suggested he contact the [Veterans Pre-College Program](https://vpc.utk.edu/) as they assist with non-education related services like disability and prior service claims. Dr. Lucal also referred Mr. Roach to [Retirement Services](https://payroll.tennessee.edu/retirement/).

1. CONSTITUENT QUESTIONS
   1. Flu & COVID Vaccination Requirement – Debbie Lane

Q: Is the flu shot requirement for staff being enforced? Will the COVID-19 vaccination be required?

A: Per System HR, University personnel must receive flu vaccine annually during the flu season and it’s up to the employee to verify their shot. Personnel may opt-out due to medical contraindications to the vaccine(s) or due to religious reasons.

Widespread vaccination, along with following health and safety guidelines, is the best way to control the COVID-19 pandemic. While the University does not require the COVID-19 vaccine for students, faculty, or staff they are strongly encouraged to receive the vaccine.

A discussion the COVID-19 vaccine took place. Ms. Roe noted that, for flu shots, completing the verification in IRIS’ Employee Self Service is easy and quick to do.

* 1. Middlebrook Building A/C – Lisa Turner

Q: What is the protocol to turn building air conditioners on? It isn’t clear, and our offices have been very warm for several weeks now.

A: Per Terry Ledford, the Middlebrook Building did not delay the air conditioning startup but instead experienced equipment failure. Repairs should be completed today. He said that the weather determines when air conditioning is turned on.

* 1. Pet Waste Stations on Campus – Jessica Woofter

Q: I have seen animal waste on sidewalks several times this year. Are animals allowed on campus? Can pet waste stations and bag dispensers be placed around campus?

A: Per Brian Browning and Terry Ledford, there are no allowances for animals on campus outside of research purposes and certain exemptions for students living in University Housing who have an Office of Disability Services documented need. Although pets are seen on campus periodically, the animal’s owner is responsible for the collection and disposal of any animal waste. There are no plans that they are aware of for campus waste stations.

A discussion about animals on campus took place.

1. 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/>.

UTK HR Employee Relations recently hosted a [Sick Leave Bank Information Session](https://youtu.be/T8uV67XkMg0) for employees interested in more information.

Paul Finley asked about donations of time to employees who were ineligible to join the Sick Leave Bank and needed time. Ms. Roe responded that the sick leave transfer policy piggybacks on the Sick Leave Bank policy, which requires recipient requests to go through a trustee review process that requires medical certification. Employees who are not enrolled in the Sick Leave Bank or who are ineligible to join may want to explore short term disability and Family Medical Leave to help with their illness or injury.

* 1. Winter Mini Term Addition

The Academic Calendar was approved to include this WMT in January 2022 prior to the spring semester starting. This term is 14 days and begins January 3 and ends January 21. An academic working group and an operational working group will continue in their efforts to create a successful WMT student experience. Additionally, spring break will fall between first and second sessions and aligns with Knox Co. Schools.

* 1. Campus Vaccination Events

The University is regularly hosting UT employee and student COVID-19 vaccination events on-campus at the Student Health Center. 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 online.

The University encourages all students, faculty, and staff to receive the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible. With Knox County opening eligibility to anyone 16 and older and an increasing vaccine supply and list of providers in the area, you have options to get vaccinated soon.

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

* 1. L&OD Upcoming Programs

Join Learning & Organizational Development for a month of growth-minded

personal development!

Featured events include:

* April 12 at 11:30 a.m.: Lunch and Learn: an Interview on Growing your Resume to Represent You with Brooke Swart
* April 21 at 9 a.m.: Professional Development: Growth Mindset – Grow Through What You Go Through

For more events, visit: <https://tiny.utk.edu/LODConnectionAprMay>

For more information about how to sign up for events in K@TE, visit: <https://tiny.utk.edu/LODK@TEInstruct>

* 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.