

KNOXVILLE OPERATIONS ERC

meeting minutes

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2021 | 1:30 – 3:00 P.M.

VIA ZOOM

PRESENT

Tom Anderson, Jason Baggett, Brian Browning, David Bryant, Jessica Cantu, Rob Chance (Guest Speaker), Jon Chandler, Jeremiah Cook, Michelle Currier (Guest Speaker), Darrell Easley, Sarah Hoel, Chris Iler, Kerrie Johnson, Debbie Lane, Terry Ledford, Mary Lucal, Chip Pennoyer, Gavin Ramsey, Ed Roach, Jeremy Smith, Jake Turner, Lisa Turner, Dave Webb, Jessica Woofter

ABSENT

Harold Bivens, Erin Blake, David Blaylock, Shannon Bruce, Charles Burton, Dedra Cotner, Crissy Douglas, Paul Finley, Steven Henry, Judy Jones, Jimmy Large, Ethan Long, Raheem Obaid, Regina Olum, Deborah Robinson, Julie Roe, Thomas Spoon, Ruby Strange

1. WELCOME

Dr. Darrell Easley, Director of Employee Relations & Learning & Organizational Development, welcomed everyone to the meeting. September marks the first official meeting of the new Knoxville Operations ERC. The new ERC combines the previous University Operations ERC and Housing and Human Resources areas from the Knoxville Administration & Student Life ERC.

Dr. Easley introduced Jon Chandler, Senior Employee Relations Consultant, and Kerrie Johnson, Learning & Organizational Development Consultant.

Dr. Easley closed his welcome by asking the group to consider how they would like to meet, with the thought of having the majority of the meetings held virtually and possibly one in person meeting each semester. The group will be surveyed in the near future.

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

Brian Browning greeted the group and shared his enthusiasm for return to campus. He began his update by announcing that the university has welcomed our largest first-year class ever at 5,948 first time freshman. Our total enrollment this fall is 31,701 students. He next announced that the new residential dining facility on the west side of campus has officially opened. The new facility, now referred to as [Rocky Top Dining Hall](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjoctCtzYSc), is a 75,000 square foot facility with three levels and includes a full-service Chick-fil-A and a large convenience store. He updated the group that the [Zeanah Engineering Complex](https://tickle.utk.edu/new-engineering-complex/), located at the southeast side of Neyland Stadium, has partially opened and currently serving some of the first-year Engineering student classes. He said it will eventually be fully ready to accommodate offices and other functions in the building, and that they were glad to have the facility partially online now. Work on the [Pedestrian Mall Extension](https://fs.utk.edu/underconstruction/johnson-ward-pedestrian-mall-extension/) covering the section from Pat Summitt Dr. to just before 20th Street continues including campus beautification and pedestrian safety enhancements. He said the project is just over $3 million dollars and should wrap up in February 2022. More information about campus construction projects can be found at [conezone.utk.edu](https://conezone.utk.edu/).

Mr. Browning closed his update by announcing that Finance & Administration is making strides towards finally rolling out the new [Budget Allocation Model (BAM) process](https://budget.utk.edu/budget-allocation-model/). Planning and utilization are underway with a variety of different fiscal officers this month. The goal is for the new model to be officially implemented for the FY2023 fiscal year.

Ed Roach asked if [upcoming construction in Neyland Stadium](https://247sports.com/college/tennessee/LongFormArticle/Tennessee-Vols-Football-Neyland-Stadium-Renovations-Update-2022-Season-Athletic-Director-Danny-White-166345459/) would start after the last football game of the season. Mr. Browning and Terry Ledford confirmed that the construction is on track to start after the end of the season, or around December 1. Gavin Ramsey asked about plans for utilizing the old Presidential Court Building. Mr. Browning responded that currently only Aramark administrative offices and student package lockers are located in the building and there are no active food service components. He said future programming for the space is still being worked out and final decisions have not yet been made about utilization but there are no plans to demolish the facility.

Sarah Hoel gave an update on the [Campus Chest annual giving campaign](https://campuschest.utk.edu/), which raises money for nonprofit organizations in our community. She announced that the campaign will kick off on Monday, September 13 and extend through November 5. Employees can pledge online or use pledge cards. Ms. Hoel asked the group to be on the lookout for the kickoff announcement and share news of the campaign with their areas.

Gavin Ramsey asked about the compensation project and compression and asked if that has changed or been allocated with career ladder funding. He said that there were employees in the Electric Shop who are in the 10th percentile for compensation. Dr. Mary Lucal responded that she was not sure what plans for the career path are. Mr. Ledford responded that they are currently working with HR Compensation on the career ladder and custodian certification program. Chris Iler asked when career ladder promotions will be completed. Mr. Ledford asked Mr. Iler to talk with him after the meeting.

Mr. Ramsey asked about the BAM, and asked Mr. Ledford how it would affect Facilities Services. Mr. Ledford responded that it is a change in how the budget process and expense process works. Mr. Ramsey asked if it would reflect current vacancies and related challenges in completing work. Mr. Ledford replied they are not far enough along to know as the same budget will continue going into the first year of implementation.

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

Dr. Easley began his update by announcing several upcoming employee surveys, including a staff engagement survey from McLean that will launch around September 14. Employees should look for an email from McLean to complete the survey. L&OD will also be sending a needs assessment survey in the next week. This survey will ask employees and leaders what they would benefit from learning more about in the next year. As part of the survey L&OD will hold a swag bag giveaway. Those interested in being included in the drawing can register at the end of the survey or visit the HR office at 105 Student Services Building to register in-person.

Dr. Easley next announced that the University is launching a new employee discount program through Partners for Health called [PerkSpot](https://stateoftennessee.formstack.com/forms/member_discount?utm_source=abcs&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=discountprogram). He provided signup information for the portal and noted the program offers discounts including the State of Tennessee Employees’ Apple Discount Program. Other discounts include movie tickets, restaurants and car rentals.

Dr. Lucal asked the group to encourage participation in completing the L&OD needs survey. She shared that they want to complement training already happening within departments like Facilities Services and shape the work L&OD performs. A discussion about the survey took place.

1. GUEST SPEAKERS
2. Annual Enrollment – Rob Chance, Payroll

Rob Chance, Director of Payroll, greeted the group and announced that [annual enrollment](https://www.tn.gov/partnersforhealth/ae/about-enrollment.html) will take place from October 1 – 15, 2021. Employees who want to keep their current coverage options for 2022 do not need to do anything. Employees who want to add, remove, or make changes to their coverage can do so through Edison, which can be easily accessed by selecting the Edison menu button in IRIS Web. [Annual enrollment newsletters](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/finance/fa-benefits/documents/st_he_news_final_links.pdf) are currently available online and will also be mailed to employees. Mr. Chance also announced that a new tool, ALEX, will be rolled out soon to help employees make decisions about their healthcare coverage.

Mr. Chance announced that premiums for the primary health insurance carrier networks, BlueCross Blue Shield (BCBS) Network S and Cigna LocalPlus, will go up an aggregate of 3.2% overall, or about $16 per month. He explained the employee and spouse option premium was found to be low compared to cost, so the state raised the monthly premium. He announced that premiums for the expanded network options, BCBS Network P and Cigna Open Access, will see a significant premium increase. He also noted that the out-of-pocket maximum for out of network care is going up across all plans. He strongly recommended that employees use in-network providers.

Mr. Chance next discussed vision and dental coverage, and noting that Delta Dental was awarded the dental preferred provider organization (DPPO) contract for 2022. Mr. Chance shared that they have had very good employee feedback about Delta Dental. Employees currently enrolled in DPPO coverage do not have to do anything, as their coverage will be changed to Delta Dental and they should not have a waiting period. There is no premium increase for the prepaid dental plan and the DPPO premiums will be going down.

Mr. Chance then discussed flexible benefits and long-term disability (LTD) insurance enrollment. Sign up information for both flexible benefits and LTD insurance will be sent directly to eligible employees as UT branded emails. Flexible benefits participants must re-enroll each year as an IRS requirement. Annual enrollment for flexible benefits is the entire month of October and enrollment is through Optum Bank. LTD insurance enrollment through Lincoln Financial will take place from October 1 – 15. Mr. Chance encouraged employees to consider enrolling in LTD coverage, and shared that they have helped employees with health issues who needed to retire early and would have benefited from having coverage.

For more information visit: <https://payroll.tennessee.edu/retirement/ltd-forms/>

Mr. Ramsey asked to confirm the health insurance premium change. Mr. Chance confirmed it will be a 3.2% increase overall. Dr. Lucal asked with the DPPO carrier change if employees have to make changes during enrollment. Mr. Chance confirmed those currently enrolled in the Metlife DPPO will automatically be changed to the Delta Dental DPPO. Tom Anderson asked to clarify specific health insurance tier premium changes. Mr. Chance reviewed the premiums by tier and by network, including the wider network’s sizeable premium increase. A discussion took place about enrollment and qualifying events. Jessica Cantu asked to clarify LTD signups. Mr. Chance responded they are working with Lincoln Financial to identify employees not currently enrolled in LTD coverage. They will be invited to signup between October 1 – 15. He compared the university’s LTD coverage to the state’s as richer and having less expensive premiums, and said there are currently about 5,600 participants. He shared his experience with the importance of LTD coverage, and said his office strongly encourages participation. Employees who are not currently enrolled will receive an email with information on how to enroll. Dr. Lucal asked about premiums, and Mr. Chance responded that it is based on salary and deducted through payroll. Dr. Lucal discussed the Sick Leave Bank and shared an employee’s experience where SLB and LTD benefitted them they became seriously ill. Mr. Chance noted that there are rules about pre-existing conditions but that LTD coverage is well worth enrolling in it. A discussion about LTD signups and coverage took place.

For more information visit the [Partners for Health website](https://www.tn.gov/partnersforhealth/) or contact Payroll/Insurance at 974-5251 or UTinsurance@tennessee.edu.

1. Paid Parental Leave – Michelle Currier, HR Compensation

Michelle Currier, Analyst with HR Compensation, greeted the group and began her presentation by announcing that the new [Paid Parental Leave](https://universitytennessee.policytech.com/dotNet/documents/?docid=807&public=true) (PPL) benefit is available to employees who work at least 75% full-time equivalent (FTE) and have at least one year of continuous service time with the university. She announced the PPL benefit was effective July 1 this year for any births and adoptions occurring on or after July 1, 2021. The benefit provides six weeks of paid leave that needs to be used within 12 months of the child’s birth or adoption. PPL can be used consecutively and in one large chunk of time or used intermittently with the smallest increment as one day. Ms. Currier noted that if an employee chooses to use their leave intermittently to work out their schedule with their supervisor and department.

Ms. Currier next noted that married couples who both work for the university are each entitled to the six-week paid benefit and it is not split between them. They can choose to use the time however it benefits them including together at the same time or at separate times. The employees should work out their schedule with their supervisor and department.

Ms. Currier noted that PPL runs concurrently with Family Medical Leave (FML) and the Tennessee Parental Leave Act (TPLA). If an employee wishes to take longer than six weeks of leave, they can do so under FML and TPLA. The maximum they would be able to take under all of the different acts and benefits is up to four months of leave. Once an employee runs out of the PPL benefit, they use their accrued paid leave. If they run out of paid leave any remaining leave will be unpaid.

Employees can apply for PPL by completing a Paid Parental Leave Request Form and a Family Medical Leave request form. As both PPL and FML run concurrently Compensation asks that employees submit both forms at the same time. Ms. Currier noted that they do not require medical certification but do ask that employees submit a copy of the child’s birth certificate or adoption documentation within 30 days of the birth or adoption of the child. The forms are [available on the HR website](https://hr.utk.edu/forms/) and completed forms and questions can be sent to FamilyMedicalLeave@utk.edu.

1. NEW BUSINESS
2. Facilities Services Interview Process

Mr. Roach said in the past anyone who submitted an application for a job within Facilities Services would be guaranteed an interview. He shared a recent constituent’s experience in submitting multiple applications but not receive interviews for any of the positions. Dr. Lucal responded that she and Dave Irvin, former Associate Vice Chancellor for Facilities Services, created a process several years ago where, if an employee did not meet minimum qualifications, they would receive an informational interview.

She asked Mr. Roach to clarify if the concern was the person was referred by HR and did not receive an interview or if they were not referred. Mr. Roach said the employee did not receive any contact. Dr. Lucal responded that if the employee met minimum qualifications, they should have been referred by HR. Dave Webb offered to talk with Mr. Roach to review the situation. Mr. Ramsey shared his experience of not receiving an interview where he didn’t meet minimum qualifications. Dr. Lucal said she would talk with Recruitment about the process to ensure it was still being adhered to.

1. Uniforms and Campus Issues

Mr. Roach shared his frustration with uniforms not being properly mended when returned to them. He said there was also an issue with uniform pants not being available in a size that fit an employee in his department, and the employee had to purchase their own work pants. Mr. Ramsey shared that he has uniforms that are missing patches that were removed and not replaced by the uniform vendor. Jeremiah Cook shared that employees in his area are having issues with their uniforms having holes, ink stains, rips and tears. Mr. Ledford responded that he would talk with Jim Tolbert, who handles uniforms for Facilities Services. Mr. Anderson shared he had talked with Mr. Tolbert and that he is aware of the issues and is similarly frustrated with the vendor. Mr. Ramsey asked Mr. Ledford if polo shirts would still be made available. Mr. Ledford said they would be.

Mr. Roach also expressed frustration in being unable to reach various campus offices by phone. Dr. Lucal responded that she wasn’t certain about System HR offices but the UTK HR office is available and should be returning calls.

Mr. Ramsey asked Dr. Lucal if COVID vaccination would be mandated as the Pfizer vaccine was recently given FDA approval. Dr. Lucal responded that there is no mandate and the state legislature has passed legislation preventing one. A discussion about constituents’ concerns about receiving vaccines and personal experiences with COVID took place. Dr. Lucal reaffirmed the university strongly encourages vaccinations and they are readily available on campus. A discussion about booster availability took place. Mr. Ledford announced the Student Health Center is currently [offering additional vaccine doses to people that qualify as high risk](https://studenthealth.utk.edu/covid-19-vaccine-clinics/) (i.e. moderately or severely immunocompromised).

For more information including campus vaccination options visit: <https://www.utk.edu/coronavirus/>.

1. OTHER BUSINESS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
2. ERAB Report – Tom Anderson

Tom Anderson discussed the recent quarterly [Employee Relations Advisory Board (ERAB)](https://hr.tennessee.edu/get-involved/committees-councils/employee-relations-advisory-board/) meeting held on August 23. He provided a report to the group prior to the meeting.

Mr. Anderson reported that President Boyd gave an update on funding including the campus funding formula. He noted new leave policies including the organ donor policy and a faculty policy to complement the PPL policy. He reported that minimum wages were discussed as were alternative work schedules, PerkSpot, and the mask mandate. He said they discussed the “great resignation” phenomenon. Dr. Brian Dickens, Chief Human Resource Officer for System HR, said he wasn’t aware of significant spikes in any particular area other than having a lot of employees reaching retiring age. He reported that Dr. Dickens will do some targeted research by campus and departments/colleges to see if some areas are having a harder time than others. He closed his report noting that the [Non-Exempt Employees Excelling Together (NEXT) Conference](https://hr.tennessee.edu/eod/conferences/next-conference/) is set to take place in October.

Mr. Ramsey asked about the [organ donation policy](https://universitytennessee.policytech.com/dotNet/documents/?docid=720&public=true). Mr. Anderson noted it was a newly implemented System policy.

Mr. Cook asked if there was any word on reinstating paid leave for employees who are self-isolating after testing positive for COVID or are quarantining after being a close contact. Dr. Lucal responded that she has not heard anything. Mr. Anderson replied there is no expectation that System leadership will reinstate the leave but he would send the question to the ERAB.

1. HR Roadshow

UT Knoxville Human Resources is once again rolling out the orange carpet and popping up shops across campus in the month of September. HR has partnered with Insurance, Retirement, and Be Well to bring our teams to you!

This is a great opportunity to assess your financial wellness (401k, retirement, beneficiaries, etc.) and to ask questions about your health benefits before the open enrollment period which starts October 1, 2021.

“Pop” by one of these Roadshow locations from 10:30 am – 12:30 pm on:

• Thursday, September 16: Student Union in the 1st Floor Lobby

• Tuesday, September 21: Strong Hall in the Atrium

• Tuesday September 28: Hodges Library in the West Entrance Lobby

No appointment is necessary to meet with representatives for a check-up on your financial wellness and benefits including reviewing beneficiary information, retirement savings options, educational assistance, insurance options, and EAP services.

Sharable flyer: <https://hr.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/56/2021/09/5th-Annual-Roadshow-2021-Flyer.docx>

1. Green Zone Training

Green Zone training will be held on September 8 from 9:30 – 11:30 am in the Student Union, Room 262A. For more information contact Tom Cruise (tcruise@utk.edu or call 865-974-8716).

The Military Cultural Competency Training (Green Zone) aims to educate the campus community about student veterans on campus. The session includes who they are, how the GI Bill works, strengths, challenges, and support services.

Registration link on the Events Calendar: <https://calendar.utk.edu/event/green_zone_training#.YTDcTY5KiUk>

1. REMINDERS:

Please email Jessica Cantu (jlcantu@utk.edu) any constituent questions.