

MINUTES

Staff Assembly

The University of South Alabama's Staff Assembly hosted a Listening Session for University staff on Tuesday, November 18, 2025 from 1:00-2:30 pm in the Marx Library Auditorium.

To help guide the discussion, participants were encouraged to submit questions in advance.

1. Welcome – Dallas Schmidt, President

Staff Assembly President Dallas Schmidt welcomed attendees, introduced the Executive Committee, provided a brief overview of the Staff Assembly's purpose and history, and highlighted the Staff Assembly website, which includes resources and an online suggestion form.

2. Ongoing Business – Dallas Schmidt, President & Coleman Wolf, Vice-President

President Schmidt and Vice-President Coleman Wolf discussed the Staff Assembly's key initiatives.

Childcare

The Executive Committee met with President Bonner and Dr. Kent, who expressed strong support for the Staff Assembly's childcare initiative and approved the formation of an exploratory committee. Key University constituencies have been invited to nominate potential members, and the Staff Assembly anticipates finalizing the committee roster by the end of the Fall 2025 semester, with the first meeting planned for January 2026.

The exploratory committee will examine the feasibility of a University childcare program, including regulatory requirements, potential locations, financial considerations, and educational components. Ideally, the childcare facility would serve children ages six months through twelve years, which aligns with national standards for university-based childcare and aftercare programs. The Staff Assembly hopes the program will be available to faculty, staff, and student parents.

Sick Leave Donation Program

The Policies and Issues Committee is revisiting the idea of allowing employees to directly donate sick leave to colleagues facing serious or life-altering illnesses. They plan to review the current [Sick Leave Policy](#) and [Family Medical Leave Policy](#) to identify possible revisions.



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Job Posting and Salary Information

The Research Committee is examining the advantages and disadvantages of including salary ranges in University job postings and is reviewing practices at other institutions, particularly R1 universities along the Gulf Coast. The group is developing a self-study to present to the Staff Assembly.

If a current employee is interested in a posted position, they can contact Human Resources for the salary information and/or how the open position compares to their current position (promotion, demotion, lateral). HR are always happy to provide that information, so employees can decide if it is something they are interested in pursuing.

Parental Leave

The Policies and Issues Committee reviewed the Alabama Public Employee Paid Parental Leave Act (SB199), which provides paid leave for state employees but currently excludes public universities. The committee discussed recommending that the [University's policy](#) be updated to better align with the intent of SB199.

3. Discussion

President Schmidt guided discussion using questions submitted in advance and audience feedback. The main topics discussed are summarized below.

Employee Retention and Pay

Strengthening employee retention and compensation emerged as a major theme of the Listening Session. Attendees emphasized that improving staff pay equity and reward structures is essential not only for morale and workplace stability but also for advancing [Discovery 2030 @ South](#), the University's strategic plan for achieving R1 Carnegie classification. Retaining experienced, knowledgeable staff is fundamental to achieving institutional excellence and meeting the goals outlined in the [University of South Alabama Strategic Priorities](#).

Staff expressed significant concern regarding pay inequity, particularly as it relates to internal promotions and the University's current compensation policy. Under the [Classification and Salary Administration Policy](#), employees promoted to a higher-level staff position may receive up to a ten percent salary increase or the minimum salary for the new classification, whichever is higher.

Staff noted that this structure can place current employees at a financial disadvantage. While internal candidates face caps on promotional increases, external applicants are often offered salaries at or near the top of the range to remain competitive with market conditions. As a result, long-serving staff with extensive institutional knowledge may find themselves earning less than new hires whom they are asked to train. Staff members shared that this dynamic contributes to frustration, diminished morale, and a sense that institutional experience is undervalued.



There was also expressed interest in reinstating merit-based pay increases, as staff felt this would help recognize high performance, support retention, and reinforce a sense of value for employees who consistently exceed expectations.

Another idea shared during the session was the possibility of adjusting the annual year-end bonus structure to acknowledge longevity at the University. Currently, employees typically receive a flat three percent bonus. Staff suggested exploring a tiered approach in which the bonus percentage varies by years of service, with employees who have the longest tenure receiving a higher percentage and those with fewer years receiving a smaller percentage. This approach was viewed as a potential way to recognize long-term commitment and reinforce retention.

Attendees also asked the Staff Assembly to explore how other institutions incentivize staff retention, with the goal of identifying strategies that could strengthen retention efforts at the University.

Employee Recognition

Staff expressed interest in expanding employee recognition opportunities across the University. Recognition feels meaningful, supports morale, and can strengthen résumés and professional growth. While the Alumni Association offers annual awards for teaching, advising, scholarship, and innovation, there are currently fewer comparable opportunities for staff, whose work often goes unnoticed.

Staff suggested exploring additional recognition programs within divisions or departments to highlight outstanding contributions. Although the University has an Employee of the Quarter program, many staff members are doing excellent work that could be acknowledged more broadly.

Staff also noted that years-of-service pins, which are distributed annually in December with a letter from President Bonner, might have greater impact if presented publicly during a meeting or small ceremony. Providing a moment of celebration could help reinforce appreciation for long-term service and dedication.

Employee Tuition and Education Incentives

- Salary Increases for Employees Completing Degrees

Attendees expressed interest in implementing pay increases for employees who complete academic degrees, noting that such recognition would encourage staff to pursue advanced education. Staff emphasized that supporting educational advancement strengthens the University by enhancing employee expertise and professional capacity.

- Educational Benefit Plan and Tuition Credit Rates

Attendees raised concerns about the current structure of the [Educational Benefit Plan](#). Under existing policy, employees hired on or after January 1, 2013, receive a tuition credit based on the prevailing undergraduate rate for the College of Arts and Sciences, applied to courses at all levels. According to the [current tuition and fee schedule](#), an in-state undergraduate course costs \$374



per credit hour, while a graduate course costs \$480 per credit hour, creating a significant disparity for employees pursuing graduate degrees.

Participants requested clarification about the rationale for this policy and suggested that the University consider revising it to reflect the number of staff members who pursue advanced degrees. The financial burden is substantial, particularly for graduate programs requiring approximately 30 credit hours. Attendees also noted that online courses carry additional fees despite being the most convenient option for full-time staff. Some staff members reported completing graduate coursework at other institutions due to lower costs and greater program availability.

- **Flexibility for Graduate Internships and Practicum Requirements**

Several graduate programs require internship or practicum hours, which can be difficult for full-time staff to complete. Attendees expressed interest in exploring greater flexibility for employees needing to fulfill these requirements, especially when the degree program directly benefits their current role at the University.

Parking

Attendees provided extensive feedback regarding parking concerns across campus. Staff expressed interest in having the option to deduct parking permit fees directly from their paychecks for convenience. While acknowledging that constructing a parking garage would improve access, participants noted that such a project would be costly and could result in increased permit fees.

Several staff members were surprised to learn that the University already uses a tiered parking fee structure in which employees below a certain salary threshold pay a reduced rate. They requested that this information be clearly published on the University's website.

Staff also raised concerns about the allocation of faculty and staff parking spaces to students who do not qualify for handicapped parking but receive temporary accommodations due to injuries or other short-term needs. Attendees requested information about how many of these temporary passes are issued, the criteria used to determine eligibility, and how this impacts parking availability for employees. Parking shortages were noted as a major concern at several buildings.

Participants also observed that students currently pay only five dollars per year for a parking permit and suggested that an increase in the student parking fee could help offset costs associated with building new parking lots or a parking garage. Finally, staff expressed interest in exploring a sliding-scale fee structure for employees based on income, as well as other equitable approaches to address parking access and affordability.

Bereavement Policy

The [Bereavement Policy](#) (5.1.6.1 Death in Family) allows employees to request up to 24 hours of paid administrative leave following the death of an immediate family member, as approved by the supervisor. The policy defines "immediate family" as a spouse, mother, father, sister, brother, son,



daughter, mother-in-law, or father-in-law, with exceptions permitted at the discretion of the Division Head. Attendees asked the Staff Assembly to explore the possibility of expanding this definition to better reflect and support the needs of non-traditional and contemporary family structures, which are increasingly common.

Parental Flexibility: Remote Work During Child Illness

Attendees also requested that the University consider allowing parents to work remotely when caring for a sick child. Remote work is not currently permitted under the [Sick Leave Policy](#), but staff noted that limited flexibility in these situations could help parents conserve sick leave and better balance caregiving responsibilities with work expectations.

Extending Thanksgiving Break

Attendees asked about the rationale for the current schedule that provides only a half day of leave on the Wednesday of Thanksgiving week. Staff noted that childcare is particularly difficult to secure during this week and expressed that receiving the full day off would be greatly appreciated.

Participants requested that the University consider extending the Thanksgiving holiday to better support employees and their families.

Alternative Schedules and Flexible Work Options

Attendees expressed interest in exploring alternative work schedules during the summer months for divisions where adjusted hours would be feasible. While recognizing that summer is a peak period for some offices, staff noted that modified schedules could provide meaningful support and improve work-life balance where operationally appropriate.

Participants also voiced interest in limited remote work options, particularly during University breaks such as Spring Break and Fall Break. Staff shared that offering a small number of remote work hours each week, when appropriate for the position, could boost morale, improve retention, and provide families with greater flexibility to manage caregiving and personal responsibilities.

Attendees also suggested exploring additional incentives for staff in positions where remote work is not feasible. Ideas included increased pay or additional vacation time to acknowledge the lack of flexibility in these roles and to promote fairness across divisions.

4. Additional Information

Campus Master Plan

President Schmidt informed attendees that the University is developing a new Campus Master Plan to assess current facilities and guide future development and improvements. To support this effort, the University has engaged a consulting firm. As part of the planning process, the consultants will meet with various University constituencies to gather input and perspectives from across campus.



Staff members are encouraged to participate in these sessions, as their feedback is an important component of the planning process. The Staff Assembly will also arrange a dedicated meeting with the consultants to ensure that staff priorities, concerns, and suggestions are fully represented.

Staff Assembly Elections

The Elections and Nominations Committee is beginning preparations for the 2027 election cycle. The committee is exploring ways to make the process more democratic and engaging, including the possibility of hosting events where staff can meet and interact with candidates. The goal is to ensure broad representation from all University constituencies.

Candidates are permitted to campaign, provided that such activities do not interfere with their assigned duties and responsibilities. The committee welcomes ideas and suggestions from staff as planning continues. Elections will take place each June.

Constitution and Bylaws Review

The Elections and Nominations Committee is also undertaking a review of the Staff Assembly [Constitution](#) and [Bylaws](#) with the intention of proposing amendments to President Bonner. Under the current structure, the University President may unilaterally amend these governing documents and may veto Staff Assembly recommendations.

The Staff Assembly aims to propose updates that more closely align with the governance structure of the [Faculty Senate](#), strengthening shared governance and reaffirming the Assembly's role as the voice of University staff. All proposed revisions will be shared with staff for review and input before any changes are advanced.

5. Adjournment – Dallas Schmidt, President

President Schmidt thanked all participants and appreciates their insights and feedback.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Alison Gay Wood, Secretary.