

UTRGV Staff Senate – April 8, 2021

Agenda & Approved Minutes

I. Call to Order / Roll Call

Present: Noelynn Llasos; Laura Ramos; Claudia Dole Morrison; Karen Dorado; Rogelio Chanes; Kevin Garza; Nicolas H Dubberly; Karina Herrera; Nayeli Garcia; Ashley Mercado; Juan Santos-Flores; Maria Juarez-Serna; Tammy Munoz; Veronica Villarreal; Armando Garza; Matthew Pollock; Marisa Campirano; Kelli Quin; Milagro (Millie) Resendez; Cordelia Rasa; Alisha Puentes; Teresa Villarreal; Irene Cardenas; Andres Chavez; Yadira Mejia; Caitlin Bruseth

II. Welcome / Introduction: Staff Senate President – Noelyn Llasos

- Breathing exercise with Carla Lopez.
- Reminder to all attendees – please mute microphones.

III. New Business

i. Approval of Meeting Minutes – March 2021

- Move to approve – Matthew Pollock; seconded – Teresa Villarreal; motion passes with Senate vote.

IV. Old Business

i. Staff Senate Feedback Form

- Reminder – Feedback form up and running on Staff Senate webpage: <https://www.utrgv.edu/staffsenate/>

V. Guest Speakers

i. Dr. Alex Racelis, Agroecology Program Director

- Students (Suzanne El-Haj, Fatima Garza, Taylor Snowden) will be presenting about UTRGV Hub of Prosperity Farm, which we try to keep student led.
- It is possible for staff to come to farm for tours.
- <https://www.utrgv.edu/agroecology/> for more info on volunteering, donations, etc...

Our Mission Statement

The Sustainable Campus Community Initiative (SCCI) is built by students, for students, faculty, and staff. Our mission is to contribute to our local food system through sustainable farming, food awareness, health and wellbeing, and educational opportunities for students across UTRGV. The SCCI aims to provide locally grown produce and healthful food to our campus community through on campus farmers markets, student led workshops, and inclusive outreach. This initiative is an outlet for students to integrate sustainability in their studies and transform through education and awareness. To carry out this project, the SCCI provides meaningful on-campus employment opportunities for students involved.

Background

The SCCI requested and received funding the prior year from Student Fee Advisory Committee

With this funding, we were able to:

- Provide employment and volunteer opportunities for UTRGV students
- Purchase necessary equipment to run our sustainable farm
- Supply produce for the campus community at our farmers markets

We manage and grow our produce at The Hub of Prosperity Farm, located less than 2 miles from campus

It is a new urban farm led and operated by students that grows food sustainably with sustainable practices such as:

- No harsh chemical pesticides
- Drip irrigation
- Minimal tilling & soil disruption
- Utilizing compost

At the Hub of Prosperity Farm

We currently have about 1 acre in vegetable production with plans to expand to 2 acres in the next year

We have also accomplished major land remediation progress including:

- Better organic weed control through cover crops and tarping
- Improved soil nutrition through cover crops and composting

Vegetable Production

We grow seasonal produce using sustainable practices

Our successful vegetables have been:

- Herbs: basil (3 types) and cilantro
- Lettuce: romaine and spring mix
- Tomatoes: 26 varieties
- Onion: green, white and red
- Peppers: banana, poblano, and bell pepper
- Kale: curly and tuscan
- Celery

We are currently experimenting with:

- Squash: zucchini, acorn, spaghetti, and gourds
- Edamame and asparagus beans
- Cucumbers
- Lavender
- Thyme
- Strawberries
- Edible flowers
- Microgreens

And other unique crops

Production at The Hub

On a weekly basis students employees:

- Move tarps to control weeds
- Start seedlings in greenhouse
- Prep plots by using walk behind tractor to till, rake, de-weed, mow
- Set up irrigation lines with basic plumbing work
- Plant multiple rows of crops
- Maintain crops with weeding plots by hand or with tools
- Turn and add to compost piles
- Harvest and store fresh vegetables

Raising Chickens

Student employees are learning how to raise and care for chickens by:

- Gathering eggs and hatching baby chicks in an incubator
- Brooding chicks at home with proper equipment such as heat lamps and medicated chick feed
- Raising chicks ensuring their health before they are transferred to The Hub

Chicken Coop Building

Before our chicken arrivals, students learned how to build a chicken coop from scrap wood and construction plans - building took over 1 month

Student employees were able to:

- Explore different woodwork techniques, create and follow infrastructure plans
- Use electric and hand saws, electric drills, staplers
- Install coop roof and attach wheels

Chicken Care

Students employees are currently brooding baby chicks at home and caring for the chickens at The Hub

Students are at the farm every day twice a day to feed them and let chickens out of the coop

We also built a fence around the coop and now are brainstorming ways to warn off predators - which will include more time and tools

Our farm infrastructure projects increase future food production potential

Some of these projects were done in collaboration with UTRGV's Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Advancement (SARA)

Project include roof building, cold storage in shed, and shade house high tunnel

Wood Work & Crafts

Students employees are also using wood work to improve farm infrastructure

This work includes signage and directions for the farm, plot labeling, and picnic tables

Students are developing their woodwork knowledge by learning how to use saws, wood clamps and drills to build



Students and the UTRGV staff farm advisor constructed a vegetable wash station and a gravel work area

Shown here is the gravel work area, it includes a dug out layer of soil underneath, layers of tarp on top, a border of metal, and gravel that was spread evenly - took roughly 1 month

Here we will be able to wash and prepare produce after harvest

Rainwater Harvest System

Student employees learned how to install gutters to our roof - this will allow rainwater to flow into our water tank

Students are learning how to set up pipes and a pump to filter and transport the rain

The tank will be implemented under the roof to harvest rainwater then recycle it into growing our crops



Student employees have been aiding graduate students on their research at The Hub and other local farms

This work includes:

- Intricate planting of crops
- Collecting soil samples
- Collecting insects

Employees have learned basic lab work and sampling procedures

Rethinking Farmers Markets

With the pandemic, we had to rethink how to operate our Farmers Markets

Since they can not be in person - we implemented online markets with pick up dates to distribute fresh produce to UTRGV students

We tried our best to replicate the appeal of a farmers market digitally through these unpredictable times

Farmers Markets were shifted online - student employees:

- Designed bilingual flyers, then printed and distributed them
- Advertised and updated social media with market details
- Collected inventory and listed produce on website
- Set up market with tables and tents in front of The Hub
- Harvested and displayed produce for sale
- Tracked profit on documents

Farmers Market Success

Revenue from produce sales goes back to The Hub - it was used for:

- Gas for equipment
- Chicken feed (\$50)
- Irrigation tools
- Pipe replacement (\$300)
- Tractor tire replacement (\$500)
- Basic farm materials
- Sanitizing materials

Catastrophic Events

Our efforts have continued despite numerous hindering obstacles — we have adapted to a global pandemic, a hurricane in the summer, and a historic record breaking freeze

We have taken serious precautions and followed university policies as well as CDC guidelines while continuing to provide learning opportunities

Employees and volunteers have been thankful for the chance to get outside and do productive work safely

Collaboration & Donations

The Hub has made numerous donations to the First United Methodist Church food pantry

These donations have included 140 lbs of cabbage, kale, collards, etc.

We have also facilitated donations by local vendors, which included 500 lbs of avocados

Campus Community Impact

We have had over 90 volunteers in our first year of operation:

- 70 from the UTRGV community
- 62 students
- 8 professors and staff
- 20 from the wider Edinburg community

Student Volunteers

Many courses at UTRGV that are focused on service learning are now tapping into The Hub as opportunities for learning

This includes School of Medicine, College of Science, and Business

Specifically with the Sustainable Agriculture course, we have had numerous student volunteers

Volunteers help with weeding and maintaining plots, basic construction

Lasting Student Impact

Through the SCCI - 7 student employees have been hired and trained in:

- Basic construction
- Farm planning
- Vegetable care and harvest
- Fruit tree care
- Soil health practices
- Irrigation
- Use of tools & farm implements

Students have been also trained in:

- Marketing and advertising strategies
- Hands-on problem-solving
- Budgeting
- Local food policy
- Sustainable food system challenges
- Coordinating a farmers market

Overall, student employees have gained meaningful on-campus employment opportunities

Student and staff volunteers have been thankful for the chance to get outside and do productive work safely during the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic

The produce we grow at the farm is beneficial in supplying healthy alternatives to students living in an urban area without affordable quality fresh food

Our volunteer opportunities provide an outlet for students to integrate sustainability in their studies and transform through education and awareness

Through the SCCI students have guaranteed beneficial employment opportunities

Volunteers gain valuable experiences working on a local farm

Graduate students and local farmers will benefit from research and projects, supplying knowledge for the community

From a health perspective - the campus community will benefit from local, organic, seasonal produce

Our work will impact not only the campus community, but The Rio Grande Valley as a whole with sustainability and progressive policies at its core

We have had numerous outlets highlighting our work including:

- Features on UTRGV TV, The Rider news paper and Pulse Magazine
- Organizations at UTRGV including The Environmental Awareness Club
- UTRGV Office of Sustainability and their [webpage](#)
- UTRGV Agroecology and Resilient Food systems Program
- UTRGV Engagement, Recognition, and Wellness [webpage](#)

This effort was also highlighted in local outlets including the [Rio Grande Guardian](#) and the [Channel 5 evening news](#)

This publicity documents the tremendous impact and student engagement that this project has had and continues to have on our community

We believe we have built something worth the investment of UTRGV as it follows our mission to transform the Rio Grande Valley, the Americas and the world

Going into the future we will be gaining more student involvement as the Sustainable Agriculture Food Systems degree program grows

We are the most impactful sustainability initiative at UTRGV and our work is the first of its kind

We are one of the few initiatives that hit every aspect of the UTRGV mission

We incorporate an accessible educational environment that promotes student success, research, creative works, health and wellbeing, community engagement and last but not least sustainable development

ii. Marta Salinas-Hovar, Associate VP, Facilities Planning and Operations

- Covid-19 Updates to processes.
- Utility reduction initiatives cost avoidance was around \$650,000.00.
- Hurricane Hanna & Arctic Front Uri impacts – loss of 12-14 million.
- Dead landscaping cannot be removed due to insurance and to see what may re-grow.
- Campus beautification projects are ongoing.
- Athletics Master plan – working on this with Chasse Conque, VP and Director of Athletics.
- Concrete bollards placed in various campus locations for safety reasons.

COVID-19 Is Among Us

How has it changed our work routine?

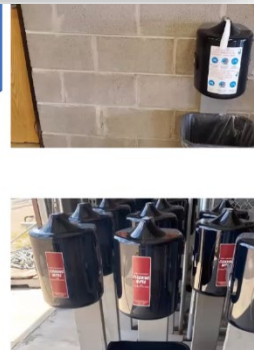
- Altered work schedules
- Social distancing incorporated into our daily work habits
- Use of masks
- Heightened use of hand washing and/or sanitizers
- Some department meetings now held outside or in open areas
- Daily requests on new processes, services and/or operations

COVID Projects - Testing

- Tents in Edinburg, Mercedes, Harlingen and Brownsville locations
- Provide power
- Provide A/C
- Provide handwashing
- Provide ice daily for the test samples

COVID Projects

- Wall Sanitizers at most main building entrances and high use spaces
- Portable wipe dispensers throughout high traffic areas
- Wipe buckets in computers rooms



COVID Projects Continued - Testing

EBNSB modifications

New ADA ramp
Furniture relocations
Room prep
Deep cleaning

COVID Projects

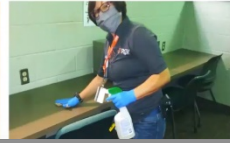
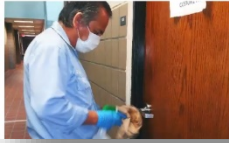
- Plexiglass installs in Edinburg and Brownsville
- Hundreds of requests for additional plexi protection built for all campuses

Custodial Processes in COVID times

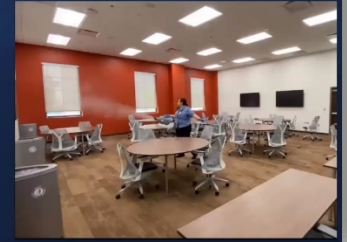
- Major changes in regular duties
- Daily wipe downs of all contact surfaces, doorknobs, counters, elevators, etc.
- Altered schedules / social distancing challenge because of size of group
- Specially trained group of custodians for emergency COVID cleaning
- Extra precautions taken due to cleaning requirements



Daily COVID cleaning
Wipe downs occur daily
Ongoing throughout the day, at all campuses

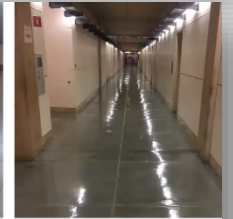
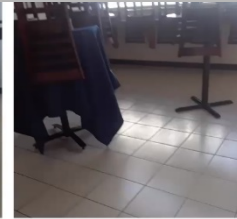
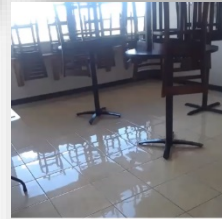


Nightly fogging



Custodial Deep Cleaning

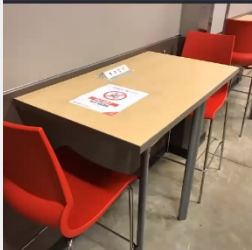
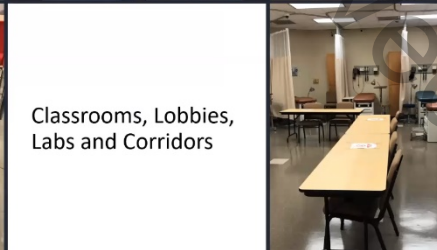
Amid COVID, we still find time to conduct deep cleaning throughout campus.



What a Shine!

This is what happens when we have the time and personnel to do our job

Furniture Preparations for COVID



Classrooms, Lobbies, Labs and Corridors

First came COVID, then came the Vaccine

What has changed...

- Still have altered work schedules
- Still social distancing in our daily work habits
- Still enforcing the use of masks
- Still have high use of hand washing and/or sanitizers
- Still holding meetings remotely, outside, or in open areas
- Still maintaining tent testing sites
- **Now also have vaccine sites at numerous locations that operate throughout the week on alternating schedules**

COVID Vaccine Sites

- Vaccine sites in Edinburg, Mercedes, Harlingen, and Brownsville
- Provided Plexi glass
- Provided power
- Provided A/C
- Provided ice
- Provided extra custodial services

Utility Reduction Initiatives during COVID

• **Tasked to reduce utility costs by 10% to 15%**

- Team initiated a program for entire University to lower utility costs
- Building setpoints have been moved to unoccupied mode where feasible
- Buildings not on BA system have been adjusted manually
- Chilled water temperatures were raised
- Water heaters for non-essential areas have been turned off
- Lights are being turned off for rooms not being used
- Trash dumpster pickups have been temporarily cancelled or reduced frequency.

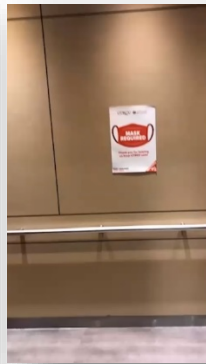
Can you believe this trash reduction alone is saving approximately \$50,000.00 while campus is at a reduced capacity!



Since COVID was not enough for us, then came Hurricane Hanna

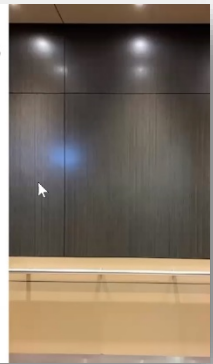
- Contractor took large scope; I.e., replace CESS roof and rebuild 50% of interior from water damage; Facilities team repaired all smaller scope
- Drying up carpets in numerous locations
- Replacing ceiling tiles throughout
- Opening doors daily and on weekends for contractors
- Inspecting contractors work to ensure it was acceptable
- Scheduling, coordinating and notifying occupants on pending work
- Weekly project update meetings

• And then came the "ARTIC FRONT" - Winter Storm Uri.....just another little winter storm!



Upgrading our Elevators

Hard to believe it is the same elevator!
And it got new equipment, too!



Can you see the Difference?

Bronc trail getting a nice facelift wash



A little construction here and there – Baseball Field and Brownsville campus



HVAC PROTOCOLS in partnership with EHSRM



1. HVAC dampers have been adjusted to maximize the amount of fresh air introduced in our buildings, including offices.
2. Buildings will be "flushed" two hours before the occupants arrive and two hours after the occupants leave to dilute any viral particles in the air.
3. HVAC systems have been adjusted to "directionally" push air from areas that are least likely to be contaminated to areas that are high risk....e.g. offices to corridors...(we do this normally anyway)
4. Epidemiological evidence is telling us that people are not acquiring the virus from other locations in the building – though mixing the air handler decreases the viral load....to where its almost impossible to acquire covid.
5. Filtration capabilities have been maximized.

Utility Initiatives

Deregulated Electricity Supply Contract:

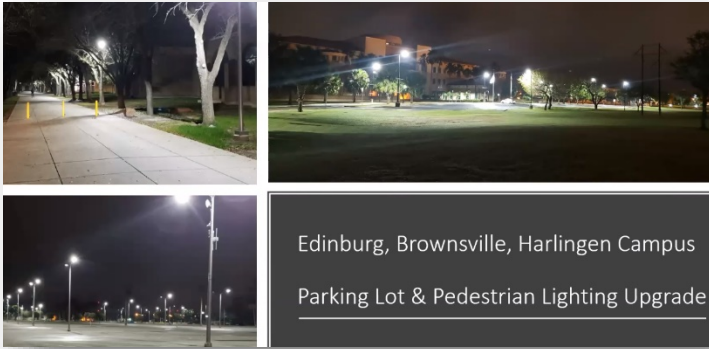
UTRGV continues to enjoy stable low rates for its 10-yr electricity supply contract (Jan 2018 – Dec 2027)

Demand Response (DR) Program Earnings Update:

- Adjustments by Edinburg cooling plant operators have earned **\$13,185.84** in cost avoidance from DR program between Jun 2020 – Sep 2020
- Eight years of DR participation has earned the university a grand total of **\$296,936.85** (Oct 2012 – Sep 2020).

Utility Rebates:

- Received **\$5,312.00** in utility rebates for chiller replacements at EITTB and EVABL
- Also received **\$6,196.00** in rebates for LED fixture retrofits in the UTRGV Harlingen Campus
- This resulted in more LED's being scheduled for upgrades



Edinburg, Brownsville, Harlingen Campus
Parking Lot & Pedestrian Lighting Upgrade

Executive Offices at Rio Bank
McAllen

- President's & Deputy President's Offices
- Governmental Affairs and Community Relations
- Institutional Advancement
- Strategic Analysis and Institutional Reporting (SAIR)
- Finance and Administration
- Strategic Enrollment (Sr. VP only)
- Legal Affairs



Brownsville Campus
Golf Cart and Hike/Bike Trail

Edinburg Campus
Golf Cart and Hike/Bike Trail
Coming Soon



All Campuses
Three Large Bus Stop Canopy Locations



Brownsville – BINAB
Expansion for new offices and labs

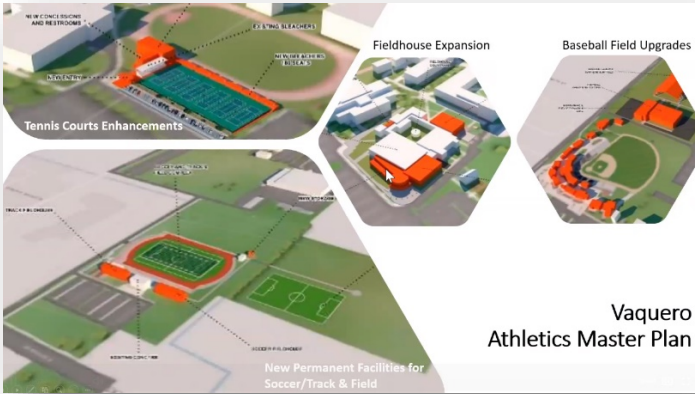


Brownsville
St. Joseph Academy
Space planning –
Coming Soon

Partnership with the Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation (BCIC) to create space for the *Entrepreneurship and Commercialization Center*; under construction

Space will include offices, meeting rooms individual and group work areas and classrooms





Edinburg – EITTB Remodel for Student Advisement

What you can expect upon your return to campus this summer/fall '21: (unless and/or until university protocols change)



1. Custodial cleaning will continue as we've been doing for the last year;
 - a. Continued fogging in classrooms
 - b. Continued wipe downs
 - c. Sanitizers and hand wipes in buildings will remain.
 - d. Water fountains will remain closed;
 - e. Bottle fillers will remain open.
2. What you can do:
 - a. Wear your mask,
 - b. Wash your hands,
 - c. Practice good hygiene,
 - d. Be aware of your surroundings,
 - e. Respect others around you, and
 - f. Respect university protocols for continued campus community safety.

VI. Committee & Task Force Reports

- i. **Communications Committee - Millie Resendez, Chair / Rogelio Chanes, Co-Chair**
 - Had first Meet Your Senator event on March 1st. Thanks to all who attended!
 - Congrats to Division of RGSNPD for most attendants at that event.
 - Next Meet Your Senator event will be on Wednesday April 28th.
 - Staff Senator Spotlight Project ongoing. Follow us on social media for these posts.
- ii. **Elections and Constitution Committee – Caitlin Bruseth, Chair / Irene Cardenas, Co-Chair**
 - Working with campus partners to get constitutional amendments to staff for voting.
 - Laying groundwork for this year's elections – more details to come.
- iii. **Feedback Committee - Karen Dorado, Chair / Nick Dubberly, Co-Chair**
 - Results for survey on Employee Appreciation Week will be presented during closed session to Senators.
 - Encourage everyone to submit feedback, suggestions, ideas by reaching out to senators or using our feedback form.
- iv. **Staff Success Committee - Claudia Dole Morrison, Chair / Jacob Camacho, Co-Chair**
 - Planning next events and looking for departments to partner with for those events.

- Looking to plan a calendar of events that will include training and activities, personal and professional development, etc.
- Will send info about prize pickups from Employee Appreciation events.

VII. Update on Employee Advisory Council (EAC) – Peter-James Ehimika, Representative / EAC Vice Chair

- Note on Departmental Email Task Force: Connecting with Hilda Gonzalez to discuss emails and addresses for UTRGV and implications; how to enhance safety, security and trust surrounding them. Will be pulling in representatives from other areas to continue discussions.
- Please see attached newsletter provided by Mr. Ehimika for full updates.

VIII. Public Comments and Questions

- Athletics Update (Carlos Munoz) Upcoming baseball game tomorrow night; starts 4 game series; happy hour before every game with \$5.00 craft beer and \$1.00 popcorn.
- Sustainable Table (Jayshree Bhat) Free webinar series through campus food security initiative; 30 – 40-minute sessions; twice a week; one is on Friday at 12:30; student employees present demos.
- <https://www.utrgv.edu/pewd/cfsi/index.htm>
- Student Unions (Massiel Munoz) – Student Unions are open Monday – Friday on both campuses, just the C-Store.

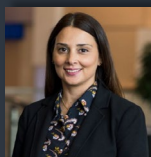
IX. Adjourned Meeting: 10:47 a.m.

Approved Minutes

Employee Advisory Council

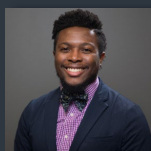
The University of Texas
System

2020-2021 Officers



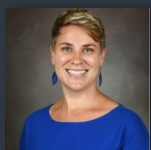
Nyma Shah, Chair
UT MD Anderson

nashah@mdanderson.org



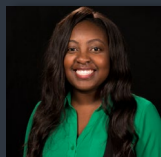
Peter-James Ehimika, Vice-Chair
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peterjames.ehimika@utrgv.edu



Trudy Jacobs, Secretary
UTHealth-Houston

Trudy.Jacobs@uth.tmc.edu



Elisa Cuellar, Historian
UT San Antonio

Elisa.Perkins@utsa.edu

Executive Sponsor:

Julie Goonewardene, Senior
Advisor to the Chancellor, Chief
Talent and Innovation Officer

UTS EAC Website:

[www.utsystem.edu/sites/
employee-advisorycouncil](http://www.utsystem.edu/sites/employee-advisorycouncil)



THE UNIVERSITY of TEXAS SYSTEM
FOURTEEN INSTITUTIONS. UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES.

One System, One Voice

Meeting Summary for March 5, 2021 via
Zoom (Virtual Meeting)

Meeting Summary:

The whole focus of this meeting was on the different areas of campus safety. There were three different guests that provided updates based on their area of expertise in this realm.

Update from Phillip B. Dendy, CRM, CIC, DRM - UT System Chief Compliance and Risk Officer:

- Discussed Emergency Preparedness Plans
- Institutions have gotten closer and have been working even more closely during the pandemic, so each institution feels even more connected in this area.
- They have gotten good at learning from any events that occur to better prepare and implement changes for future events, hoping to ultimately mitigate future events.

Patrick Durbin, Associate Director for Risk Control joined Phillip Dendy:

- Every institution had a format that they implemented for the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic they had plans, but nothing that could speak to this level.
 - Having preliminary plans they were able to create something by knowing the business continuity plans.
 - Turned into a “loss of workplace” event. IT teams across all institutions were very well prepared and ready to make the changes necessary to work effectively.

Update from UT System Director of Police Michael J. Heidingsfield:

- Third largest police force in the state of Texas.
- Less cadets in training than normal due to the pandemic, but he is hopeful that they will be able to get positions filled soon as the vaccine starts to be distributed more widely.
- Crimes of violence against person have had a slight downturn during pandemic mostly due to the fact that there were less people on campus.
 - Situational awareness is the single most way to prevent crime.
- Director Heidingsfield mentioned the main areas of importance to him have not changed due to the pandemic and they still keep him up at night.
 - Sexual assault. Need a police force that can respond empathetically.
 - Suicides. On average there are about 20 per year.
 - Terrorist attacks. Soft targets within UT. Nuclear reactor at UT Austin, animal research, etc.
 - Active shooter. Generally happen more at workplaces or campuses for higher education.
 - Alcoholism as victimization. This is particularly important for sororities and fraternities.
 - Insider threat. People join our institutions with not pure intentions and are working to steal intellectual property.
- Response to the George Floyd incident - Director Heidingsfield comes to work every day with goodness in his heart and feels like it is a calling for him protect people.
 - He believes most officers feel the same as him and that the incident was the exception and not the rule.
 - [Read his open letter after the incident here.](#)

Institution Updates:

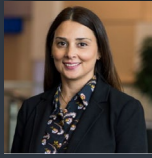
- Most locations have some kind of civility or standards of conduct policy in place that outline how to behave as an employee.
- Every institution has some kind of alert system in place to notify employees, staff and students about any kind of safety event.
- Most institutions have some kind of safety audit. They are not all done yearly and don't all review the same items. This is probably something that could be streamlined.



Employee Advisory Council

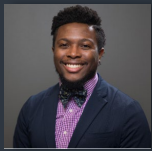
The University of Texas System

2020-2021 Officers



Nyma Shah, Chair
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Peter-James Ehimika, Vice-Chair
UT Rio Grande Valley

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Trudy Jacobs, Secretary
UTHealth-Houston

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Elisa Cuellar, Historian
UT San Antonio

Elisa.Perkins@utsa.edu

Executive Sponsor:

Julie Goonewardene, Senior Advisor to the Chancellor, Chief Talent and Innovation Officer

UTS EAC Website:

www.utsystem.edu/sites/employee-advisorycouncil

Sub Committee Updates:

Diversity and Inclusion:

- Working on toolkit that will be used system wide.
- Gathered institution feedback via survey.
 - Review survey information
 - Assign toolkit topics and begin work
 - Develop a diversity celebration/education day template

Campus Safety:

- Created a list of intended deliverables that included:
 - Propose regular safety audit
 - Provide campus civility policy toolkit
 - Propose emergency preparedness plans update frequency
- Goal is to have a draft of each of these by the May Board of Regents meeting and have it finalized for the August meeting.

Telecommuting and Future Work:

- Created a one page summary for each institution based on the information gathered.
- Working to create telecommute guidelines by incorporating information from each institution.
 - Plan to include suggested guidelines from other successful programs.

Mentoring and Coaching:

- Plan to focus more on mentoring vs. coaching for this year.
- Working to determine what is realistic to accomplish this year.
- Identified mentoring resources in Skillsoft and working to find good resources in LinkedIn.

On the Horizon

- Next EAC Meeting: May 7, 2021



Photo of our EAC Representatives representing the International Women's Day theme!
#ChooseToChallenge

