

North Dakota State Staff Senate Meeting Minutes

December 8, 2025 @ 2:30pm CT via MS Teams



The NDUS Staff Senate serves to represent staff employees from the eleven academic institutions and employees throughout the university system. The Senate identifies staff interests and issues; acts as a forum for the discussion of staff-related matters; and facilitates communication on behalf of the campus staff members with the NDUS Commissioner and the State Board of Higher Education.

- 1) Called to Order at 2:30 pm.
- 2) Roll Call
 - a) BSC – Jessie Bessert
 - b) CTSO – Greg Carlson, Marla Hagemester, Joshua DeNio
 - c) DCB – Misty Lindgren, Mike O’Toole
 - d) DSU – Laura Fetting
 - e) LRSC – not present
 - f) MaSU – Shannon Hofer, Mindy Oconnor
 - g) MiSU – Heather Halverson
 - h) NDSCS – Amy Carson, Maggie Jordahl
 - i) NDSU – Corey Landowski, Andrea Ludwig, Jenn Young
 - j) UND – Anna Kinney, Mariah Pingleton, Brandon Wallace
 - k) VCSU – Erin Edinger
 - l) WSC – not present
 - m) HRC Rep (Mindy Oconnor) – present
 - n) SBHE Rep (Anna Kinney) – present
- 3) Approval of Agenda – approved by unanimous consent
- 4) Approval of November Meeting Minutes – approved by unanimous consent
- 5) Welcome SBHE Member DJ Campbell
 - a) Introduction by SBHE Rep Anna Kinney
 - i) Vice chair of SBHE, serves on SBHE Academic and Student Affairs Committee and SBHE Research and Governance Committee
 - ii) Vice president and chief human resources officer for Sanford Health since 2020
 - b) Offer floor to Member Campbell
 - i) As VP and Chief HR Officer for Sanford, oversee all the employees in ND (~16k; Bismarck and Fargo, GSS – long-term care and assisted rehab facilities); started during COVID so even though it’s only been 5 years, feels longer with all that had to be learned during COVID
 - ii) Currently, the chair of the Workforce Development Council for the state of ND; on the Advisory Board for the medical school at UND; board member of the ND chapter of Make-A-Wish Foundation

- iii) When met with Gov. Burgum, 3 things he thought he could contribute:
 - (1) There was no one with an HR background on the board so felt like that was something he could bring to the Board.
 - (2) Sits on ND Workforce Development Council and thinks that a synergy between higher ed and the Council is very important.
 - (3) Works in a company with a similar institutional structure. One overall system with smaller parts with individual autonomy.
- iv) Two months ago went to CCF to meet faculty members. As an HR person, likes to be in front of people. Can learn a lot just by listening. Meeting with students at the end of spring at their social. – Will have met with all 3 groups (faculty, staff, and students) then.
- v) Willing to answer questions and elevate anything we need to the Board.
- c) Open floor to discussion and questions
 - i) Tuition waivers discussion
 - (1) Have been brought up – expand to going across campuses. Campbell doesn't think it's ever been formally discussed by the Board. Campbell couldn't lead because he has a wife that is employed at BSC and a son that attends so it would be a conflict of interest. ND SSS can put together a proposal to be brought to the Board.
 - (2) It's a lot bigger than thinking about just your campus. For students at the 2-yr institutions, do they start at the 2-yr and then transfer
 - (3) Have to think of how the funding works – currently, the university where the employee works pays the waiver and gets money from the funding formula for you attending the class. If you are attending elsewhere, the institution would be paying the waiver but not receiving money from the funding formula. Some institutions don't have a line item for waivers. I.e. DCB was using professional development funding to pay tuition waivers.
 - (4) Anna let Member Campbell that Carol Campbell (WSC) had done some research on how other systems are doing tuition waivers
 - (5) Possibly tie dependent waivers to years of service in ND? That way ND is getting a return on their investment in the dependent's education
 - (6) Joshua DeNio – only 50% of online courses covered for employee tuition waivers – has that been discussed?
 - (a) Definitely can be looked at
 - ii) Presidential searches update
 - (1) BSC – identified search committee; met last week to put together the presidential profile (basically job description), will be posted Dec. 10th and will have time for people to apply; Member Campbell was originally going to be the co-chair but recused himself

due to appearance of potential conflict of interest with wife being the assistant to the President, Tim Mihalick will be the co-chair from the Board

- (2) NDSU – going quickly because University of Wyoming presidential search which has similar programming; identified committee; Jace Beehler and Kevin Black are co-chairs; committee is starting with listening sessions; should have a profile ready to go and accept applicants after the first of the year
- (3) Those two searches are anticipated to be done in March. There is discussion of several special board meetings to be held in March to interview candidates. Goal is to be ready to go in March for BSC and April for NDSU.
- (4) VCSU – Campbell and Buchholz are the co-chairs; an interim has been appointed; start search in February with someone hired at the May board meeting
- (5) Have all Presidents start by July at the latest – will be a busy time for the board with estimated Presidential hires in March, April, and May
- (6) There's a lot going on in the background with the searches. Searches aren't easy to do because there's a lot that goes into them. They're significant. Working through the logistics of a search, getting the candidates and everyone scheduled, all that stuff takes time and energy.
- (7) Turned over 5-6 presidents in the last 18 months – need to look at what we need to do in that space to hopefully retain them a little bit longer, whether that's creating some level of succession planning within the system so that we've got some organic growth; seems like we've become a launching pad for outside people to come in, spend 3-4 years here, and then go somewhere else; more to come on that, haven't finalized anything but Larson and Campbell will be looking at that

iii) Alignment process and how staff can contribute

- (1) Had a lot of turnover in the system; Chancellor Hagerott retired and we now have Commissioner Sanford; From the moment that Hagerott announced his retirement, there was this inkling to look at what does having a system really mean? Had a retreat in August that kind of talked a lot about how does system alignment work and how it works with the autonomy of the individual institutions.
- (2) RFP – looking at constituents to see if we're doing well or if there are things that need to change
- (3) Ended up going with Sagency, a Fargo-based company – doing a lot of things to get feedback: live listening sessions in Grand Forks, Fargo, and Bismarck. Grand Forks and Fargo have already happened and had 50-60 people show up. Fifty 1-on-1 sessions that the agency will do with some of the bigger stakeholders. Have asked if agency will do a

focus group with Staff Senate and Faculty Senate – actually an ask from CCF. Will also be doing a survey that will be sent out to everyone in the state of ND. Also looking at other systems and how those systems are structured across the United States.

(4) Have RFP done in March with strategic planning meeting in April

iv) Member Campbell said if there's anything specific you want to ask about, feel free to reach out to him at any point.

d) Discussion regarding topics discussed with Member Campbell

i) Anna brought up the tuition waivers. If you have feedback, send it to Anna and she'll put something together for Chair Black.

(1) Jessie Bessert mentioned that there are a lot of people looking outside the state for online programs.

(2) Need better understanding of how tuition waivers work. Who is actually paying the waiver? Can we centralize the funding for tuition waivers?

6) Reports

a) Campus Updates – Submit to website

i) BSC – Board Member Campbell stepped down as co-chair and Tim Mihalick will be leading it with Karen Erickson, Dean of Enrollment Services; On track for enrollment goals; Bavendick Center is on track to be finished in February; approval for dorm for football students; had to move staff appreciation dinner to December and president has offered additional funds to include faculty; Some discussion about their designation as a 2-yr institution

ii) DCB – started search for campus dean, search committee has been put together and held their first meeting, job has been posted, start interview process middle of January; Christmas party next week with staff & faculty

(1) Reminder that DCB shares a President with Minot State University but have a campus dean that acts like the President for the day-to-day running of the College.

iii) NDSU – Dr. Heidi Pecararo has been selected as our next Attending Veterinarian effective Jan. 1st, 2026. She is currently serving as the interim Attending Veterinarian. Dr. Shari Veil has been selected as our next Provost starting on Jan. 5th, 2026. She is coming to us from UNL and is a graduate of NDSU. She is from ND. The Presidential Search Committee has been formed and invited faculty, staff, students, and committee to take a short, five-question survey to help shape the leadership profile and priorities for the search. The search committee had its first meeting on Dec. 5th, which was open to the public. We are still waiting to hear official word on who the interim president will be and when President Cook's last day will be.

Staff Senate is holding a Real Colors training for Staff Senators on Wednesday, December 10th.

- iv) UND – Few deans search going on; middle of 31-day raffle fundraiser they do that helps support professional development; Strategic planning group has meeting and planning an event in the Spring; Shared governance award for faculty, student, and staff – staff senate collects the nominations for those; had movie night last week; had turkey bingo event
 - (1) Question from Mike regarding funding campus engagement events – Brandon said they get funds from the President’s office to do the campus engagement events
 - (a) Jenn pointed out that there are 3 main types of dollars for Staff Senate: appropriated, local, and foundation. Foundation funds give you the most flexibility. Food can’t be paid for with appropriated funds and must be open to more than Senators. NDSU has both a scholarship and staff support fund in their Foundation.
- v) VCSU – Busy on campus; named interim President Dr. Allen Burgad, Dean for Education department, working on forming search committee, have until Dec. 19th to get names to co-chairs; Co-chairs are Member Campbell and VP of Business Affairs Erica Buchholz; next week is Viking gift swap, looking forward to that and Christmas parades and all the stuff Staff Senate does
- b) SBHE Staff Advisor Report (Anna Kinney):
 - i) Met virtually on 12/4/25.
 - ii) Started again with system spotlight
 - (1) Spotlight from DSU’s AI institute of teaching and learning
 - (2) Campus spotlight was from UND
 - (a) Update was really space themed
 - iii) Passed several things that had come out of committees
 - iv) Student Free Speech and Policy revisions were pulled out from general consent
 - (1) Chris Pieske mentioned that it has been aligned to better meet campus needs. Revised to reflect language from FIRE (Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression)
 - v) Reduced credit hours bachelor's degree – sent back to committee to revise to bring back to the December meeting
 - (1) Came back with 7 guard rails
 - (a) Controlled program rollout
 - (b) Strategic program selection – aligning with workforce needs
 - (c) Limiting programs to Bachelor of Applied Science degrees that emphasize career readiness

- (d) Non-licensure programming – programs with licensing or special credentialing would not be allowed to offer reduced credit degrees
- (e) Mandatory advising – discussion regarding the implications of completing a reduced credit degree: impacts on future education, financial aid implications, etc.
- (f) Transcription notation – basically an asterisk that shows that the degree differs from traditional bachelors degree
- (g) Internal tracking
- (h) Concern about transcription notation – might do more harm than good
- (2) Not a lot of understanding of downstream effects yet
- vi) 2 Executive Sessions
 - (1) Conversations about interim presidents
 - (a) Appointed interim president for VSCU
 - (b) Will not appoint interim president for NDSU yet although there were names pitched out
 - (2) Resource sharing between institutions including the first draft of policy to make sure that it benefits all institutions and there's good protection to make sure that it's sustainable.
- vii) Heard from Meredith Larson about presidential evaluation process.
- c) HRC Update (Mindy Oconnor):
 - i) Was not at the last meeting so no update right now.

7) Business Agenda

- a) Taskforce Chair Updates
 - i) Legislative Taskforce/Bylaws (Anna Kinney)
 - (1) Met Friday, December 5th for the 2nd time. Have another meeting scheduled. Hoping to get a set of revised Bylaws for everyone to make comments and review for the January meeting.
 - ii) Staff Recognition (Heather Halvorson)
 - iii) Professional Development (Greg Carlson)
 - (1) Met on November 20th; next meeting scheduled for December 18th
 - (2) Looking at opportunities for engagement, even virtually, across the system
 - (3) There are a state employees book group and a state employees movie group – get together just to discuss books/movies.
 - iv) Staff Affairs (Carol Campbell)
 - v) Executive Committee (Mike O'Toole)
 - (1) Did not meet since last meeting.

- b) Nomination of SBHE Rep (Election at January Meeting)
 - i) Tabled for next meeting.
- 8) Open Discussion
- 9) Future Meetings: January 12, 2:30-4:00 CT.
 - a) Meredith Larson will hopefully be attending the January meeting. She was unable to come today.
- 10) Adjourned at 3:39 pm.

Additional Information:

- NDSSS Website - <https://staffsenate.ndus.edu/>
- Campus Updates Submission - <https://staffsenate.ndus.edu/campus-update-submission-form/>