

**The University of Southern Mississippi
Staff Council Minutes
February 3, 2004**

1.0 Call to Order

President Kittrell called the meeting to order at 9:46 a.m.

The following members were present:

Susan Blackwell, Cheryl Burnette, Kalin Butirich, David Byrd, Scott Carr, Kameron Dale, Donna Donegan, Sally Donovan, Victoria Adams Fairley, Kathy Hayman, Keri Hensarling, Myra Herndon-Wade, Charmaine Hill, Valerie Horne, Robin Johnson, Susan King, Virginia Kittrell, Robert Lowe, Beverly McNeese, Stephen Rey, Ray Scott, Tonia Shaw, Ray Stevens, Toni Stringer, Frances Sudduth, Mary Butler Sumrall, and Mary Virgil.

2.0 Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted with reservation to change the order as necessary.

3.0 Call for Proxies

The following members were represented by proxy:

Robin Barnett by Pam Posey, Mathew Cox by Donna Donegan, Karen Lott by Cheryl Burnette, Stacey Ready by Stephen Rey, William Sanders by Virginia Kittrell, Arlin Steen by Charmaine Hill, and Vicki Watkins by Robin Johnson.

The following member was absent without representation:

Tommy Dye

4.0 Approval of Minutes

4.1 December Proposed Minutes

The minutes of the December regular meeting were approved as submitted.

4.2 January Proposed Minutes

The minutes of the January regular meeting were tabled. These minutes will be presented for approval at the March regular meeting.

5.0 Officer's Reports

5.1 President's Report – Virginia Kittrell

Jan. 20, 2004 – Jones County Junior College – Economic and Technology Symposium

Speakers at the symposium were as follows:

Dr. Angie Dvorak

“The Necessity and Future of the JCJC Advanced Technology Center”

Andy Taggart, interim president and CEO of the Mississippi Technology Alliance

“The Synergies between MTA and the JCJC Advanced Technology Center”

Blake Wilson, president of the Mississippi Economic Council

“The Business Outlook for the JCJC District and also Forrest and Lamar Counties”

Dr. Phil Pepper, state economist

“The Outlook for Mississippi's Economy for 2004”

Mike Jenson, former NBC chief financial correspondent

Dr. Dvorak stated that it is important for information to travel. Commerce is the brainpower for our own people. If we don't have the capacity to build intellectual inventory, we won't be able to thrive. We need to look for ways to bring headquarters, research and development here to south Mississippi. The new technology center is about innovations, where new ideas and technology come together. The competitive advantage is the local advantage. Demographics are important for future goals. Dynamics in the community affect school age children and how they develop goals. Howard Technologies is an anchor asset.

Taggart spoke about synergy and quoted Winston Churchill, "Don't give in. Move out." We must always keep moving forward. We are on the edge of history with the information/knowledge age. We can't spend all our time planning. It should be spent doing. Economists say we have smart people who work hard, and we have an abundance of natural resources. We must act with audacity to move up from the near bottom. We must understand who the enemy is: It is us. Common enemies are tyranny, apathy, ignorance, and poverty. We must determine that we are all fighting the same enemies.

Blake Wilson has made a commitment to sustainability. For example: highways, efforts to create economic opportunities in Mississippi. Mississippi is rated in top 10 for highways as a result of sustainability. The Mississippi Economic Council has a plan for education, economic development, and the business climate. What is projected? Employment growth: Mississippi will experience an 11 percent increase and the Jones County area will experience a 10.2 percent increase. In Mississippi, we need to sustain our efforts. Mississippi ranks 13th in the nation for community and junior college graduates. We must retain jobs to continue growth in economic development. University research expenditures have risen during the years 1998-2001. It is a huge positive for Mississippi. Universities are outspending the private industry two to one.

Dr. Pepper projected that the population centers will continue to grow while rural areas will continue to struggle. Mississippi will grow slower than the national average. Manufacturing has grown in Mississippi, but we still have the lowest per capita income. Too few jobs are not the problem; low-paying jobs are the problem. The educational level of Mississippi citizens is the weakest link. Low-paying jobs grow slowest in increases because people can't afford to pay higher wages, and technology is replacing low-skilled jobs.

The greatest challenge to our leaders is change. Leaders need to think outside the box. Bureaucracy has a built-in resistance to change. Standardized test scores continue to stay at the bottom compared to the rest of the nation, which suggests Mississippi will not do well in the future when more skills are needed in math and science areas.

We're on the front of another economic crisis; Mississippi is trying to solve the wrong problems. We have more economic development opportunities but don't utilize them. The weakest links are workforce and education. Adult education programs are fragmented. We can't just supply programs; we need to create demand for programs, and parents need to raise their expectations. Parents need to teach their children to do more than to just get by in life.

Jenson talked about the economy. The growth rate was up 3.9 percent last year and is growing nicely. Interest rates for a 30-year mortgage are under 5.5 percent. Inflation is very low; interest rates will increase slightly. Unemployment will be around five percent by the end of the year. Allen Greenspan will be named for another term. He listed several myths about the economy. 1) The ballooning deficit will sink the economy. False: In the short run, it has helped it. In the long

run, yes, deficits hurt. 2) All good factory jobs have gone overseas. False: The number of goods producing jobs has decreased from a switch in manufacturing jobs to services jobs. 3) Unemployment is rampant. False: It is low by standards coming out of a recession. Higher-paying jobs are difficult to find. Education is so important. 4) Social security is broke and is in need of immediate repair. False: We have a surplus, but it will shrink and disappear in about 30 years because of the baby boomers. Social security withholdings will increase slightly. Things that could go wrong and send stocks lower are continued problems in the Middle East, a new terrorist attack that would undercut business/economic confidence, and another new war.

Cabinet – Jan. 26, 2004

Enrollment is up three percent for all levels at all campuses.

There was some discussion about the July 4th holiday. It is undecided whether it will fall on Friday or Monday.

With regard to the academic calendar, there is some thought on revising the number of contact minutes for academic classes to consider giving flexibility. There is no board policy on having mini-semesters.

Dr. Jay Grimes said the retreat went well. There were discussions about expanding offerings on the coast.

There are efforts to get the MDOT sign changed on the coast that reads “Regional Campus.”

Bob Pierce announced the Joe Johnson endowment now has \$19,000 raised through mailouts. The endowment is set up for a master’s student in economic development.

The Legislative luncheon, held for the alumni in the state legislature, is set for next week.

Jared Loftus said that a concert is still in the planning. Elections are coming up, with the deadline next Monday at 5 p.m.

Faculty and staff will be given two tickets for the televised Faculty/Staff Appreciation Day basketball game.

It has been calculated that 2.1 million households viewed the Liberty Bowl game. The football schedule for next year is in the works, with the first home game on Sept. 25 against California. Artificial turf donated by an alumnus will be installed in the stadium.

President-Elect’s Report – Valerie Horne – Faculty Senate – Jan. 16, 2004

The first hour-and-a-half of time involved discussions about the *Faculty Handbook*. Bill Taylor, chair of the handbook committee, was asked many questions. He reported that the entire version would be on the Web and go to the president next week.

There were several announcements made, including the following:

- Dr. Ken Malone is the new chief operating officer at the Gulf Coast campus.
- Dr. Grimes would no longer be provost at the Gulf Coast campus. We have since learned this was a rumor with no basis.
- The Van Hook Golf Course would close.
- WDAM would air interesting information about Southern Miss at 6 p.m.

There was discussion about the increase in the number of adjunct instructors. Questions regarding how much money had been saved due to the reorganization were brought up.

5.2 Secretary's Report – Robin Johnson – no report

5.3 Secretary-Elect's Report – Keri Hensarling

Secretary-Elect Hensarling asked that all committee chairs and executive officers have a written report prepared for the monthly meeting and send an electronic copy of the report to the secretary or secretary-elect immediately after the monthly meeting. Reports are not being filed in a timely manner and it makes it extremely difficult to produce the minutes if the minute-taker doesn't have a report from all members who delivered reports during the meeting.

5.4 Assignment of Action Items

#102 – assigned to Salaries & Benefits

How was a clerical position in the College of Arts and Letters upgraded from a level 6 to a level 7 in a year when position audits were not being performed? This happened within the last two or three months after someone was terminated from the level 6 position.

#103 – assigned to Salaries & Benefits

I have heard that since August 2003, two employees in Human Resources have received raises of \$1 per hour. This information came from a very reliable and dependable source. Is this true? If so, how can raises in this (or any other) amount be justified to other staff members on campus who did not receive anything? With the reorganization of the colleges in January 2003, a majority of staff members assumed additional duties without the benefit of a raise.

#104 – assigned to University Relations & Cultural Diversity

Three separate action items were turned in regarding the fact that the heating system in Kennard Washington Hall has not been working properly.

The heating system in Kennard-Washington Hall has not been working the entire month of January, creating unsatisfactory working conditions. Staff members have been wearing coats, gloves and blankets throughout the business day. There are many days that it is colder in the building than it is outside.

#105 – assigned to Salaries & Benefits

What and when are opened positions required to be advertised before being filled? Open positions have been filled in recent months without being advertised. Please clarify rules and regulations for open positions.

6.0 Old Business

6.1 Vacated Positions

President Kittrell stated that a decision has not been made with regard to the vacated positions. The Constitution and Bylaws committee is reviewing the possibilities.

6.2 Staff Handbook

President Kittrell stated that she will continue to communicate with Gregg Lassen periodically to find out how the handbook revisions are coming. Lassen stated at our last meeting that we are not afforded the opportunity to be a part of the revision process.

6.3 Staff Council Award

President Kittrell announced that Staff Council will present the Staff Council Award again this year. This award is presented to an outstanding staff member of the University community who is nominated by a Staff Council member. Nomination forms will be sent out next month.

7.0 Committee Reports and Assignments

7.1 Constitution & Bylaws – Kathy Hayman – no report

7.2 Legislative – Cheryl Burnette – no report

7.3 Salary & Benefits – David Byrd and Myra Herndon-Wade – no report

7.4 University Relations & Cultural Diversity – Robin Barnett and Mathew Cox – no report

7.5 Technology & Training – Ray Scott and Toni Stringer

The network rollout began Feb. 2 and will last 20 to 25 weeks to replace equipment no longer manufactured. The Physical Plant complex is the first building scheduled for the upgrade. Based on those results, the project plan will be refined so that all offices will suffer the least disruption possible.

President Kittrell stated that she has heard concerns that the Staff Council minutes are not posted to the Web. President Kittrell asked that we try to resolve this as soon as possible.

7.6 Other Committees

A. Institutional Effectiveness – Mathew Cox – no report

B. Sexual Harassment – Charmaine Hill

Becky Woodrick has been invited to speak to Staff Council regarding sexual harassment.

C. Transportation Committee – Mary Butler Sumrall

The Transportation Committee met Jan. 20. The main topic of discussion was about ways to remedy the abuse of visitor parking passes. The committee proposed in January that “open parking” be designated for visitor parking. However, the Transportation Department is working with iTech to develop a program to keep track of those receiving visitor passes. A driver’s license will be required of all requesting a visitor’s pass. iTech will provide a laptop to be used for this purpose. Lucy Bowens will hopefully know by the Feb. 3 meeting if this plan can be implemented. If it cannot, then visitor parking in open parking lots will be implemented.

The first week of school 612 tickets were written, but most were for no display of decal, parking in no parking zones, and parking in handicap parking. There are four ticket writers, and one more will be hired. The committee considered one traffic appeal, which they denied.

Bob Hopkins, director of University Police, spoke about changes that will be taking place on the campus this spring and summer. Almost 40 percent of campus streets will

be resurfaced. While the streets are being resurfaced, changes in handicap parking will be made to make it more accessible where needed. We are in

ADA compliance with the number of spaces required on a campus this size, but many spaces are not located where the needs are located. He proposed that all nine parking spaces between the Fine Arts building and Hardy Street be designated handicap parking, and former handicap parking will become faculty/staff parking in other lots. When the old Southern Arena Theatre is torn down, the entire lot will be designated handicap parking; there will be 32 to 35 parking spaces. Keep in mind that when handicap parking spaces replace faculty/staff parking, faculty/staff will gain spaces in other locations. There is also discussion of changing back to the decal rather than using a hangtag. The new parking lot on Ross Boulevard will hold 300 to 400 cars.

The Transportation Committee will contact other Conference USA public universities to compare the cost of parking, number of ticket writers, and the location of visitor parking. Lucy Bowens has already contacted Jackson State University, Mississippi State University, the University of Mississippi, Louisiana State University, and the University of South Alabama. Members of the committee will contact the University of Memphis, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, East Carolina, Houston, and South Florida.

We meet again on Feb. 3 at 3:30 p.m. and will report on our findings at that time.

D. Scholarship Committee – Virginia Kittrell

President Kittrell and Kathy Hayman met with Gregg Lassen regarding the textbook scholarship proposal. Lassen stated that there is no money from the administration to fund the scholarship. Several options were discussed, including loaning the books to staff members; however, there is a possibility that the bookstore will be outsourced in the near future.

Mississippi State's Staff Council has a fund-raiser each year to sell at cost an article of clothing or an item with the school's logo. They center this fund-raiser around Staff Appreciation Day and use it as a morale booster. They also sell hamburgers and hot dogs during the event. We could do something similar and charge a few dollars over cost to help fund the textbook scholarship. Ben Samel has spoken to the committee regarding endowments.

E. Space Allocation & Utilization – Virginia Kittrell

President Kittrell will be submitting Staff Council suggestions to the University Space Allocation & Utilization Committee, which is trying to establish criteria to allocate space that will be fair and will create policy. They are soliciting input from faculty and staff. They have reviewed recommendations from other universities.

F. Election Committee – Kathy Hayman

The election committee will meet immediately after the Executive Committee meeting on Feb. 17.

8.0 New Business

8.1 March Staff Council Meeting – J.L. Scott Aquarium

Staff Council will hold the March regular meeting on the Coast at the J.L. Scott Marine Education Center and Aquarium. Staff Council will provide boxed lunches. Robin Johnson has arranged for a tour of the aquarium. Dr. Sharon Walker, administrator of Scott Aquarium and professor in the Department of Coastal Sciences, will be the speaker. Johnson thought that this would be a great opportunity to introduce Staff Council to the staff at the aquarium. Since the

recent Staff Council reapportionment, GCRL/MEC&A/Cedar Point have three members on Council. Currently, Kalin Butirich is the only member representing this group. Elections are just around the corner and this may create interest in Staff Council.

8.2 Communication

It is important to have open communication between Staff Council and the administration. President Kittrell does not want any member to be hesitant to discuss issues with a member from the administration present. Gregg Lassen has expressed interest in attending our meetings. Last month, Lassen was able to give immediate input on a topic being discussed. Kittrell opened the floor for comments and suggestions. Stephen Rey asked if our meeting was open to anyone and if visitors could give input at the meeting? Staff Council meetings are open and visitors can give input if called upon to do so. Lassen does not want to stifle our exchange of comments by his presence. Lassen stated to President Kittrell and Hayman that he does not have a hidden agenda. He is trying to improve communication between staff and the administration. There was a concern that some problems between members of Council have occurred in the past. Members may feel threatened to speak out for fear their comments will be repeated to a boss. Robin Johnson stated that having Lassen attend the meetings will go a long way to build the trust between staff and the administration. A suggestion was made that Lassen be allowed to stay through committee reports. Any new business could be discussed openly and objectively by Council members. This new business will be considered old business the next month and Lassen could make any comments at that time.

9.0 Announcements

9.1 Changes in Administrative Positions

Dana Keith - controller
Beth Cooksey – budget director
Sam Thomas – leaving Southern Miss for Ole Miss

9.2 Closing of the Southern Miss Gulf Coast Credit Union

Robin Johnson stated that the Gulf Coast branch of the Credit Union will close Feb 27.

9.3 Medical and child care reimbursement plan change

Southern Miss has changed the company that will administer the medical and child care reimbursement plan. The new plan year will run from January to December, which is a change from the old plan administrator. Children over 13 are not eligible for the child care reimbursement. If you have any questions, contact Human Resources.

9.4 IHL Meeting – Feb. 19, 2004

9.5 Staff Council Executive Committee Meeting – Feb. 17, 2004, 10 a.m.

10.0 Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:18 a.m.

Robin Johnson
Secretary
Feb. 3, 2004

Becky Woodrick updated Staff Council about the mediation program offered at Southern Miss. Woodrick introduced Staff Council to two mediators and allowed them to give their perceptions of the mediation program. Woodrick announced the mediation team has undergone extensive training.

Mediation is a completely voluntary and confidential process. Mediation is a guided conversation between two people who are having a dispute or conflict. The employees sit down with two mediators, who provide guidance to resolve the conflict. The mediators do not resolve the conflict but give assistance in resolution. Mediation is not a legal process like arbitration. The mediation process can take between two to seven hours for a resolution to be reached. At a minimum, participants walk away with a better understanding of points of view of the other affected staff. The best-case scenario is that a resolution is made to which all parties agree. The university mediation team is a very diverse group made up of faculty and staff of different races and genders. The mediation team does not have any connections to the parties having problems to ensure confidentiality of the mediation process. All mediation notes are shredded at the end of the mediation process.

Lakisha Harris, a mediator, works in Residence Life. She stated that our University is a community similar to the one you go home to every night. In any community, individuals will have disputes. The goal of the mediators is to help members of the University community come to a reasonable agreement that will allow them to work better together in their work environment.

Connie Morgan, a mediator, works at the University Clinic. She stated that confidentiality is her biggest concern. The confidentiality is what impressed her about the mediation process. Mediators ask open-ended questions to guide the participants. The team completed two intensive days of training and will continue to train.

Once approached by an affected staff member, Woodrick begins the mediation process. She contacts the other party and invites the person to join in mediation. Mediation will only be set up once both parties agree to mediation. Mediation does not always end in a resolution and does not replace the chain of command or the grievance process. Supervisors may suggest, but not require, mediation; the employee must request it.