



University Staff Advisory Council Meeting Brief and Updates November 2023

Council members attend monthly meetings that are not open to the public. This brief highlights non-confidential topics that may be shared widely with staff. Any questions can be directed to the linked resources or to askUSAC@psu.edu. For information on USAC, the Voice for Penn State Staff, visit the [USAC website](#).

November Meeting Recap

Council members approved several measures that will position USAC to more successfully advocate for policies, procedures, and programming that have a positive impact on Penn State staff. First, the council voted to establish an ad hoc committee to draft a three-year strategic plan to guide the growth of USAC that aligns with its mission and values. The council then voted to create a second ad hoc committee that will develop a proposal on how the council could transition from its current state as an advisory entity to a more representative, shared governance body that can more effectively impact policies and decisions on behalf of staff. The committee will present the plan for the full council later this academic year and expects to present these recommendations to Penn State administrators in June 2024.

The council also met with Provost and Executive Vice President Justin Schwartz for questions and discussion. Provost Schwartz discussed his goals for Penn State's faculty, staff, and students and his role as the university's chief academic officer. He then participated in a Q&A session with council members.

Committee Updates

- **Communications:** Members continue to share staff highlights, recognitions, and news on social media and updated the USAC website to better reflect the activities of the council.
- **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging:** The committee is drafting additional questions to ask staff during the upcoming travel meetings to Lehigh Valley and Beaver campuses. They are also collecting upcoming DEIB-related workshops or events so they might be shared University-wide.
- **Logistics:** The committee supported the travel meetings and Zoom focus groups for staff who volunteered to participate in virtual meetings with USAC.
- **Membership and Elections:** Members completed a review of preliminary research and benchmarking of organizations that represent staff at other institutions.
- **Outreach:** The committee held its first community engagement meeting at the College of Medicine in Hershey on November 2. The committee thanks the College of Medicine staff and the Logistics Committee, for the well-received and successful travel meeting to their campus. The committee is also planning additional community engagement meetings to Lehigh Valley in March 2024 and Beaver in June 2024.

Collaboration with Faculty Senate

This fall, University Staff Advisory Council leadership was invited to accompany the Faculty Senate Leadership on their fall campus visits. The goal of these visits is to listen to the issues facing employees and students across each of the campuses so that Faculty Senate can provide honest insights to unit leadership. All of the visits are designed to be completely confidential so participants can speak freely. After each visit, the de-identified feedback is presented to the campus' leadership team and then Faculty Senate Officers compile a comprehensive report of all their findings and present it to the Provost and Vice President for Commonwealth Campuses (VPCC). The final report is then submitted to the faculty senate for approval in a Plenary Session during the spring semester. Once approved, you can find the full published report on the Senate's website. [The report for spring of 2021 academic unit visits can be viewed on their site.](#)

During these visits, USAC's chair, chair elect, and past chair visited eight different campus locations (Hershey, Penn College, Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Schuylkill, Hazelton, Fayette, and the Altoona) and heard from faculty, staff, and students who shared a variety of topics that were important to them.

In Spring 2024, USAC has been invited to participate in University Park College visits; alongside Faculty Senate, USAC members will visit Penn State Law, The Graduate School, and the Colleges of Education, Engineering, & Earth and Mineral Science. Keep your eye out for communications from your college/unit.

Staff Facts or Benefits: Software at Penn State

A variety of computer software is available to Penn State students, faculty, and staff members for no cost or at a reduced cost. Find more information at <https://www.software.psu.edu/>.

Next Council meeting

The next USAC general council meeting is on Tuesday, December 12, 2023.

University-wide committee involvement and staff opportunities available

USAC officers and members sit on a variety of external committees, which can be found on the [USAC Impact page](#).

Important News and Updates

- **Reports of bias on the rise** - The council learned that 43 reports of bias were filed in the month, most of which targeted Jewish and Arab students, faculty, and staff following the violence in Israel and Gaza that began on October 7. Sadly, this is a record number of reports in a single month since the process was created in 2001. USAC echoes President Bendapudi's call to come together as one Penn State community and focus on compassion and empathy towards our colleagues and students. Faculty, staff, students, and guests who witness or experience acts of bias or intolerance can anonymously [report incidents through the University's Report Bias webpage](#).
- **GSI's coming in January** - Penn State is beginning the process to implement general salary increases (GSI) for faculty and staff, following [action by the Pennsylvania legislature](#) and governor to release Penn State's 2023-24 appropriations. New salaries will be reflected in January 2024 paychecks, and the salary increases will be retroactive to July 1. Read more in the [Penn State News article from November 17](#).

Reminders

- Flu shots are available through the University Health Services (UHS) Pharmacy for faculty and their dependents over 18 years old who are covered under the University-sponsored health insurance. Penn

State Human Resources also [highlighted ways for staff at campuses or with other health plans to get a free flu shot](#).

- Applications for the Administrative Fellows Program are now being accepted. By serving under the mentorship of a senior-level administrator, fellows receive opportunities to broaden their perspectives and experiences in higher education administration. Visit the [program website](#) for more information.
- The [Safe Walk Service](#) is a program at the University Park campus designed to provide walking accompaniment for Penn State students, employees, and visitors who may feel unsafe walking alone on campus at night. To Request a Safe Walk, call 814-865-WALK (9255).
- Winter Break Schedule: December 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, and January 1, 2024

Valuable links

- Show a colleague how much you appreciate their efforts with a [Positive Paw](#)
- Recognize a fellow Penn Stater by submitting a "[WE ARE](#)" shout out in Penn State Today
- Don't miss important announcements and news from [Penn State Today](#)
- Learn how to identify and report [spotted lanternflies](#)
- The Penn State community is encouraged to report potential issues about behavior that is inconsistent with the [Penn State Values](#). A 24/7 [Penn State Hotline](#) is available or call 800-560-1637.

About USAC

The University Staff Advisory Council consists of dedicated staff who act in an advisory capacity to central administration; explore issues, policies, and practices that impact staff; suggest revisions to policies and new policy initiatives; and advocate for staff welfare and development. USAC serves the PSU president and administration through the vice president of human resources and accepts new members annually.

Contact us: askusac@psu.edu

USAC Website: <https://hr.psu.edu/university-staff-advisory-council>

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