



General Meeting Minutes

August 26, 2026

10:00 am

Wingo 315

Senators Present: 28

Senators Absent: 1

Ex-Officio: Present

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- I. Call to Order-** Meeting called to order by Pres Kern at 10:12am.
- II. Approval of the Minutes from the previous meeting**
Minutes from the previous meeting have been approved and are on the website.
- III. Guest Speakers**
None
- IV. Officer Reports**
- A. President, Sherita Kern
1. Healthcare Overview
 2. Upcoming Guest Speakers
 - a) Kevin Carter- 09.09
 - b) Amy Whitehead + HR: Bewell; Healthcare- 09.09
 - c) Dr. Kurt Boniecki- 09.30- Upcoming Higher Learning Commission renewal
 3. Start, Stop, Continue- FY27 Goals- Listed below
- B. Vice President, Dylan Richardson-
1. University Committee Appointments
 2. New Senator- Sheri Hylton- Representing University Relations
- C. Treasurer, Shalia Delph
1. Budget Update
- D. Secretary, Teresa Burton- No report
- E. Parliamentarian/Historian/Assistant Treasurer, Bo Blew-No report
- F. Ex Officio, Jennifer Ruud- No report
- V. Senate Committee Reports**
- A. Courtesy Committee -2 cards
- VI. University Committee Reports**
1. Veterans Committee
 2. Employee Benefits Committee
 3. Retirement Committee-Training- OneDigital is a great resource to help with your retirement needs. A new retirement plus program has been implemented.
- VII. Constituent Concerns/Communication**
- A.** On behalf of the College of Health and Behavioral Sciences Staff Leadership Team, We respectfully ask the Staff Senate to reconsider the current requirement that staff members complete eight volunteer hours in order to be eligible for Professional Development (PD)funding. We value the work of the Staff Senate and recognize the important role it plays in supporting staff across the University of Central Arkansas. We also appreciate the time, effort, and resources that go into making professional development funding available.

Our concern is specifically with tying access to those funds to a mandatory volunteer-hour requirement. We believe professional development should be viewed as an investment in UCA staff and the university as a whole, rather than a benefit employees must earn through additional unpaid service. Professional Development Is Already a Significant Commitment Professional development requires a meaningful investment of both work and personal time. Conferences, workshops, and training opportunities often involve travel, early mornings, evenings, or time away from family and other personal responsibilities. In addition, many staff members regularly contribute beyond the normal scope of their positions through after-hours projects, special events, grants, committees, and other departmental or university needs. Requiring an additional eight hours of volunteer service creates another demand on employees who are often already giving significant time and energy to UCA. Many qualifying volunteer opportunities also occur during evenings or weekends, requiring staff to sacrifice additional personal or family time. Other opportunities, such as Commencement, may occur during the workweek and require employees to step away from their regular job responsibilities. For these reasons, we believe the volunteer-hour requirement creates an unnecessary barrier that may discourage staff from pursuing valuable professional development opportunities.

Equity and Fairness

We are also concerned about the equity of the current requirement. Faculty members have access to multiple professional development funding sources that do not generally require volunteer service as a condition of receiving support. Staff members, who often have fewer professional development resources available and generally earn lower salaries, are asked to complete additional unpaid work to receive what may be a comparatively small funding award. Professional growth should be accessible to employees at every level of the university. Requiring one employee group to complete volunteer hours to access development funds creates a disparity that we believe deserves reconsideration.

Transparency and Consistency

In addition to removing the volunteer-hour requirement, we encourage the Staff Senate to consider greater transparency regarding the professional development funding process. Staff would benefit from clearly communicated information regarding:

- The maximum amount of funding available to an individual applicant;
- The criteria used to determine award amounts;
- How available funds are distributed among applicants; and
- Why employees with similar professional development requests may receive different award amounts.

A clearly defined and consistently applied rubric would help employees better understand the process and set realistic expectations when planning professional development activities. Financial Considerations for Staff The financial impact on staff should also be considered. Some PD awards may be relatively small—often around \$200—while conference registration, travel, lodging, meals, and other expenses can total significantly more. When departments are unable to cover the remaining costs, staff may be required to pay the difference out of pocket. At the same time, employees are navigating increased financial pressures, including higher insurance costs, the loss of previous bonuses, the absence of a cost-of-living adjustment, and other changes or reductions in benefits. Against this backdrop, requiring eight additional volunteer hours to qualify for a relatively modest professional development award can feel disproportionate to the assistance being provided.

Professional Development Benefits UCA

When UCA invests in staff development, the benefit extends well beyond the individual employee. Professional development allows staff to strengthen their knowledge, develop new skills, learn best practices, and bring valuable information and ideas back to their departments. It helps employees remain competitive for advancement opportunities, encourages retention and engagement, and ultimately strengthens the university. Removing unnecessary barriers to professional development could also encourage more staff members to seek training and educational opportunities that directly benefit their offices, departments, colleges, and the UCA community.

Recommended Changes

The College of Health and Behavioral Sciences Staff Leadership Team respectfully recommends that the Staff Senate consider the following:

1. Eliminate the eight-hour volunteer requirement for professional development funding eligibility while maintaining an appropriate application and justification process.
2. Base funding decisions on factors such as demonstrated need, professional benefit, benefit to the university, and available resources rather than volunteer hours.
3. Establish and communicate a clear and consistent funding rubric, including maximum award amounts and criteria used in determining awards.
4. Explore opportunities for additional university funding to supplement Staff Senate fundraising and expand the resources available for staff professional development.
5. Continue to encourage staff participation in university volunteer opportunities but make that participation optional rather than a condition of receiving professional development support.

We want to emphasize that this request is not intended to diminish the importance of volunteerism or staff involvement in the UCA community. Staff members across campus generously give their time and talents to support university events and initiatives, and we believe those contributions should continue to be encouraged and celebrated. However, volunteer service and professional development serve different purposes. We do not believe access to opportunities that strengthen an employee's professional skills—and ultimately benefit UCA—should be contingent upon completing unpaid volunteer hours. We respectfully ask the Staff Senate to consider removing this requirement and evaluating ways to make professional development funding more equitable, transparent, and accessible to all UCA staff.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and continued commitment to supporting staff across the University of Central Arkansas. We appreciate the opportunity to share these concerns and welcome continued discussion about how we can collectively strengthen professional development opportunities for UCA employees.

RESPONSE by Pres Kern

Greetings! Thank you for your concern. This will be thoroughly reviewed by Exec and the Professional Development Committee. Since it is a constituent concern, it will also be mentioned in the general body meeting and fully published in the minutes.

I do want to clarify that the funds that we are privileged to provide to staff is a result of the compensation from football, basketball and public appearances volunteering. If no one volunteers, we don't receive funding and that pot of money doesn't exist. We would love to have the liberties of faculty; however, our budgets are structured differently and we try to be good stewards of the funds we have. We will provide a detailed response. Please allow time as we don't meet as exec until next

week. If any within leadership would like to attend a meeting to speak, please let us know. Also, as a reminder that general body meetings are open to any UCA staff member to attend.

B. CONSTITUENT CONCERN

Unsure if this is a question for HR or the President but I look forward to a response in the minutes.

How long can a staff position remain open before a department is forced to acknowledge that the position isn't critical to replace?

Why is it acceptable for a director role to remain vacant for more than three years?

What's the cutoff for a vacant position before the department has to prove it's still needed?

Is HR or anyone monitoring this type of thing?

At a certain point, it has to be acknowledged that the work has obviously been reallocated to existing/remaining team members. The salary should then be split among the team members carrying the extra weight of the additional responsibilities.

RESPONSE- CHIEF OF STAFF

Thank you for raising this concern. The university recognizes that long-term vacancies can place additional responsibilities on employees who remain in a department, and we take that into account when reviewing positions.

HR is involved in the university's position and compensation processes, but decisions about whether a position is still needed are made through the university's administrative review process.

There is not a set amount of time after which a vacant position must be eliminated. Administration reviews open positions on a case-by-case basis. Vice presidents bring forward requests to fill positions, which are reviewed by the President, Provost, Vice President for Finance and Administration, Vice President for Student Affairs, Vice President for Information Technology, and Chief of Staff. When there is uncertainty about whether a position is still needed, we may leave it vacant for six to 24 months while we evaluate the work and the department's needs. Sometimes we find the work can be handled without filling the position. In other cases, the position remains necessary, but filling it may not be the highest budget priority at that time.

When employees take on significant additional responsibilities because of a vacancy, the university may use some of the salary savings to adjust employee salaries. Salary savings may also be returned to the general budget and used for other high-priority needs.

The university does not assume that every vacant position should automatically be refilled. We continually review vacancies to make sure our staffing reflects current needs, resources are used responsibly, and employees are not carrying unreasonable workloads.

Employees who have concerns about their workload are encouraged to raise those concerns through their chain of command. HR leadership is also available as a resource to help address specific workload concerns.

C. Concern -Have any of our UCA police officers signed a 287-G agreement with ICE?

Response from Deputy Chief Bentley

No, we have not had any UCA police officers sign this form.

VIII. Old Business- None

IX. New Business- None

X. Good and Welfare

A. Senator Ruud-Today is the last day for students to make schedule changes.

B. Senator Sparks- Upcoming information session if you do social media, communications, websites, etc on September 15 during x period in the Board of Trustees conference room. New guideline documents information and other topics will be covered.

- C. Senator Turner-SGA budgets uploaded into New Cub Connect. If you need help with purchase requests, please contact tturner10@uca.edu or sdelph@uca.edu . Applications open for SGA positions. They need a Faculty advisor.
- D. Senator Hylton- Wendy Sparks is leaving UCA Public Appearances.
- E. Senator Hall-Associate of Science degree has been officially added to Banner.
- F. Senator Smith- There will be changes made to our cart services coming in the Spring 2027.
- G. Senator Delph- Back to School Breakfast tomorrow in McCastlain Hall.
- H. Senator Vangsnes- Shuttle drivers around campus will provide transportation around campus. Professional Development opportunities are available through MYUCA-Go2Knowledge.

XI. Adjournment

Motioned by: Senator Watson @ 11:04am. Second: by Senator Turner

Important Dates:

- Next Meeting: Wednesday, September 9, 2026
- W(h)ine & Cheese: Sept. 24th @ 4:30 pm | Elizabeth House
- Staff/Faculty Senate Holiday Mixer: Tuesday, Dec. 1st @ 5pm | President's House

FY27 Staff Senate Goals

START

- Rethink Staff Homecoming Celebrations
- On-campus Professional Development opportunities for Higher-Ed Staff
- Better Advertising of Funding Opportunities

STOP

- Funding requests that do not have a clear connection to the Staff Senate Mission
- Funding reoccurring department initiatives that do not have a plan for future sustainability
- Conversation to expand the current number of remote-work day

CONTINUE

- Dining with Staff Senate Events
- Staff Appreciation events (pies and drinks)
- Guest speakers at meetings from offices around campus to highlight new initiatives or explain important decisions happening on campus
- W(h)ine and Cheese with consideration of varying dates and activities (e.g. Pub-style Trivia)
- Staff Senate Representation @ New Employee Orientation