

Staff Senate Minutes

February 17, 2026 (2:00-3:30pm)

Meeting location - Calapooia Room in the Werner University Center 130

<https://wou.edu/ces/conference-and-event-services/meeting-spaces/werner-university-center/22870-2/>

Welcome

- Conversation opportunities for personal and professional updates with guests and Senators

Staff Senate follows Simplified Robert's Rules

- Under simplified rules, it allows for a little less formal communication, still providing everyone opportunities to bring forth their ideas.

Approval of this agenda

- Approval as is, additions, or adjustments must be approved

In-Attendance: Rip Horsey, Ambre Plahn, Sandra Holland, Melissa Eddings, Ellie Baker, Tessa Paulsen, Robyn Lopez Melton, Emily Herb,

Absent: Maya Guerra, Gregg Vineyard, Kodee Harding

Guests: Shari Wheeler, Michael Logan, Dan Rockwell, Kathryn Melvin

Approval of past meeting minutes

- February 3 Minutes approved

Reports

- Committee Reports
 - Shared Governance
 - Next Meeting: March 11, 2026
 - President's Cabinet
 - Discussion around budget realities and strategies
 - SOU financial challenges
 - A report was given that cash flow and reserves may run out by the end of the academic year.
 - During the legislative session, a question was asked about whether HECC knew about SOU's situation or not to which HECC responded, stating it is not their responsibility to monitor the colleges/universities budget. Each university operates under their own independent board and is responsible for their financial situation.
 - Lobby Day
 - Importance of supporting higher education; 60 participants signed up

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- This year focused on all 7 universities coming together to talk about higher education as a whole and the importance of investing more funding in our universities.
- Legislative actions and ramifications
 - HECC will be going through the programs that each university will be able to continue to offer, essentially taking away those decisions from the universities themselves.
- University Council
 - Peer Comparator Update Presentation (Judy Sylva and Jessica Murfin)
 - In their new model, they have 13 comparator schools that are roughly the same size as WOU. In this model, WOU falls within the top of the rankings in various categories. This data set is a working document, and they are still working on the data points to review, etc. In their previous version, it looked at 7 comparator schools which WOU fell around the end of the scale. Is this the model we want to continue with, where WOU is near the top of the list, or do we want to focus on a smaller pool where WOU is closer to the middle/bottom and gives us a goal to work towards improving?
 - Budget Process and Tools (Camarie Moreno)
 - Camarie has worked on updating the Budget Office website that now provides a Budget Dashboard and Resources for Budget Managers to help develop their departmental budgets, etc. Check out the website at: <https://wou.edu/budget/>
- Other - Administrative Equity, Staff Connections, University Advisory Committees, etc.

Vice President's Corner

- Other shared governance information, elections, reminders, etc.
- Recruitment for Staff Senate
 - Classified vacant seat - still looking (please reach out if you have questions)

Secretary/Treasurer's Updates

- Financial, business-related, fun facts, random questions, etc.

Unfinished Business

- Discussing SMART Goals and Strategies for 2025-2026
 - Scholarship strategy - payroll deduction for forty staff asking for \$5 [drive] will be incorporated with Giving Day, and can be done beforehand too.
 - Establishing ways to enhance cross-communication among staff regarding the different areas of change, efficiencies, training, feedback, and data collection survey
 - How can we continue to advise and make recommendations to the university president on matters relevant to staff for the overall success of the university without input?
 - If feedback is not being asked for by the departments that made the changes, then it should be up to Staff Senate to ask these questions.

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- Dr. Peter's listed it out, "...we are always open to ideas and suggestions. We want to hear what is going well, but we also want to know what challenges people are facing."
- Also with his statement in mind, "We have shifted systems, revised how we do our work, implemented a new strategic plan, implemented an equity action plan, changed recruiting strategies and marketing, achieved reaccreditation, engaged in new ways with communities, and opened a new student success center."
- It seems to be a moment when it is okay to assess where we may be in the [cycle of change](#). (This is not an endorsement of the specific model, just an example of stages within change that seemed easy to look through.)
 - We have a lack of structures that exist across campus, so people aren't sure who to communicate changes to.
 - We continue to operate within silos and unless you have a direct connection with or know someone connected with a specific project or department, communication across campus is still very limited.
 - We continue to see Email communication that overwhelms our inboxes. Or, when trying to navigate the many platforms available to us to try and separate the various categories that in itself can sometimes remove you from the conversations and/or leave you feeling overwhelmed.
- A conversation to hear if staff are still hesitant in providing honest, direct, or maybe not in alignment with the original direction feedback, survey ideas?
 - Feedback can cause discomfort or awkwardness
 - Culture is driven through moments of truth
 - It is part of the Staff Senate's mission to "Promote positive, respectful, and constructive dialogue among staff, faculty, administrators, and students."
 - Perhaps this is just something of lore, which is why we are asking.
 - This is not lore, people are concerned about providing true and honest feedback openly. Staff want to provide their feedback, just not openly.
 - If Staff Senate distributes a survey, it is important that the questions are clear, focused, and centered on the structural changes we have experienced on campus. Our goal is to understand what is working well and where improvements are needed, with an emphasis on systems and processes, not individuals. We hope to gather honest, constructive feedback that administration and department leaders can thoughtfully consider as we work together toward positive change.

New Business

- Discussion around "Strengthening the Pack -- Looking Forward" email sent out on Tuesday, February 10th.
 - **Executive Summary:** To put the university on a more sustainable path, we will reduce expenses by approximately **\$5.2 million over the next two years**.
 - **\$2-\$3 million in reductions will be identified by June** and reflected in the FY27 preliminary budget.

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- **An additional \$2–\$3 million will be achieved next year** through restructuring that reduces costs and reallocates resources to priority areas.
- Strategies under consideration include eliminating services, reducing or eliminating filled and vacant positions, streamlining programs, reducing operational and athletic costs, consolidating services, and adjusting budget allocations to better reflect actual spending.
- Following the June BOT meeting, we will launch **Strengthening the Pack**, a university-wide process to guide this restructuring work and position WOU for long-term sustainability, innovation, and regional impact. This work will be difficult, and some decisions will affect people and programs, but no single action will solve our challenges. We must make thoughtful, collective choices about what we continue, what we stop, and what we shift.
 - Comments around the room suggested that rather than a timeline of communication, it would have been nice to see a timeline of what has happened over the last 2-3 years to cut costs thus far.
- March 17, 2026 - Recruitment event, 2:00-3:30 pm, ideas?

Announcements and Reminders

- Announcements
 - Digital Accessibility Requirements 101
 - Newsletter section with a Did you know? And the tip of the week
 - WOU digital accessibility training underway
 - Agenda item suggestions can be made to staffsenate@wou.edu or wou.edu/staffsenate
- Important Training Reminders
 - Business Office
 - Campus-Wide Trainings- Watch for emails from Cheri Darby and Sandra Holland
 - Check out the @WOU Newsletter for more optional events, departmental updates, and training opportunities
- Kudos/Recognition
 - Ryan Ellison – “This person is an educator at his soul. Ryan is always happy to take the time to explain how things work and help his team in any way he can. His can-do cheerful attitude is greatly appreciated.”
 - Amanda Owren – “Amanda not only explained the catering order system, but actually went through it with me, step-by-step, while I placed an order! Super awesome!!!”
- Public Comments - Anything for the good of the order?

Upcoming

- Next meeting: March 3, 2026, @ 2 pm
 - Werner University Center (WUC) room 130
 - Guest: TBD

Adjourn