

Staff Council Meeting Minutes

APRIL 21, 2026 ■ 10:00-11:30AM ■ TRUETT SEMINARY 107

The meeting was called to order at 10:01am by Eric Ames.

Staff Council Chaplain Luke Whiting shared a time of spiritual formation and prayer.

March minutes were approved with a motion by Luke Whiting.

Staff Council Chair Chelsea Derry introduced special guests Cheryl Gochis, Vice President for Human Resources and Chief Human Resources Officer, Mary Alexander, Vice Provost for Administration and Operations, and Brian Denman, Senior Associate Vice President of Budget, Planning and Analytics. Notes from the Q&A panel discussion moderated by Chelsea include:

- Cheryl expressed appreciation for the invitation to attend the Staff Council meeting and explained that she will be taking notes to bring to the President's Council.
- **What does the five-year budget plan/forecast look like?** *Brian Denman:* Baylor does not do a five-year budget. Instead, the University does a 10-year financial model in order to help determine long-term impacts of decisions made today. Today, the plan is focused on reducing tuition increases. There will be adjustments past June focused on improving efficiencies and bringing down costs for students.
- **How do recent layoffs align with the University being in a "healthy financial situation"?** *Cheryl Gochis:* Financial health is not just where you are, but what you are looking into in the future. Baylor has a strong brand position but anticipates financial challenges related to the enrollment cliff and other headwinds. Baylor is aiming to be proactive, rather than reactive. Other "financially healthy" institutions are also taking similar, or more drastic, proactive steps.
- **Do we know how many layoffs have occurred?** *Cheryl Gochis:* We are looking at about 30 layoffs or potential layoffs (about 1% of total workforce), but not all have been communicated or decided. Communication has been grouped by position in order to help individuals secure other positions at the university when possible.

- **Were senior leadership salary freezes or reductions considered during the budget assessment?** *Mary Alexander:* The committee reviewed salaries, organizational charts, benefits, expenditures—across the board. The committee looked at senior leadership salary cuts, but this would not have made a significant impact on the structural deficit. In addition, there were concerns about retention of senior leadership if changes were made. *Cheryl Gochis:* Baylor is currently still recovering its competitive edge due to salary freezes during the pandemic.
- **Is the retirement reduction permanent?** *Cheryl Gochis:* This is intended to be a permanent reduction; however, benefits, as always, will continue to be evaluated. HR is providing additional resources to help employees manage their retirements. 8% is still competitive across the industry.
- **Is there a plan in place to restore staff morale after these cuts and reductions?** *Mary Alexander:* These are headwinds and feelings that are shared across higher education institutions. We are here because we believe in the mission of our university, and we're all in this together to help our students. That's what we should focus on right now. *Cheryl Gochis:* We would love to hear ideas to encourage staff morale.
- **As staff positions are reduced, will service expectations be adjusted for staff who are picking up those responsibilities? What compensation (monetary or otherwise) are being considered?** *Cheryl Gochis:* University-wide, we do not have a lot of knowledge on that piece. Everyone is encouraged to visit with their leaders in their units to talk through priorities and non-priorities.
- **How is leadership evaluating technology/AI in staff roles?** *Mary Alexander:* We are not planning on AI replacing staff or faculty. We hope it is being used as a tool that allows staff to focus on discernment, mission, and relationships. AI is a tool to help do your job faster. *Cheryl Gochis:* AI for Baylor is being viewed as job enhancement, not job replacement.
- **How is leadership prioritizing cost-containment measures across the university?** *Brian Denman:* Processes are in place to encourage thoughtfulness around capital projects. Technology prices have been increasing because of demand, so the university is considering different strategies to keep costs down. There are likely policy shifts related to how money is spent that need to be considered.
- **In the current projections, are other adjustments to benefits, staff reductions, etc. being considered?** *Brian Denman:* Benefits are tricky. Outside of retirement, there is not a lot of movement potential. We would like to see positive momentum that will impact costs. A retirement match was discussed but didn't make a lot of

headway. *Cheryl Gochis*: In considering a retirement match, several factors were discussed, including legal timelines as well as the potential for a match to have a greater negative impact on those with lower salaries. Ideas about reducing costs are encouraged.

- **Is revoking tuition remission being considered?** *Cheryl Gochis*: From a benefits perspective, tuition remission is one of the greatest benefits we have. The program does have limitations, including vesting times and requirements. Those policies need to be followed in order to control costs. Nothing has been heard about taking it away.
- **How do budget assessments affect the strategic plan, including initiatives like capital projects?** *Cheryl Gochis*: Strategic plan initiatives were considered during the budget assessment. Protecting the plan was very important. *Mary Alexander*: There may be some slowdowns, not due to the budget assessment but more related to faculty hiring. *Cheryl Gochis*: Factors like changes to the GradPLUS programs could have a significant impact on the University, and Baylor is working to reduce those impacts.

Follow up questions or newly sparked questions may be sent to Chelsea_Derry@baylor.edu.

Luke Whiting, Chair of the Membership Committee, provided updates on the new member election process, including:

- Nominations are now in.
- Elections are only needed in one unit, which will be finalized this week.
- Eight new members will be coming in for the next year.

Chelsea noted that Staff Council will not remove positions that have been affected by staff reductions, but instead, it will adjust seat numbers at the conclusion of terms.

Chelsea discussed executive committee nominations and initiated the confirmation process for the next academic year.

- Chelsea entertained a motion from Enid Watkins-Holleyman to elect Daniel Ramirez as 2026-27 Staff Council Chair. Staff Council affirmed the motion and elected Daniel.
- Chelsea entertained a motion from Daniel Ramirez to elect Jaime Basher as 2026-27 Staff Council Chair-Elect. Staff Council affirmed the motion and elected Jaime.
- Chelsea entertained a motion from Jaime Basher to elect Elizabeth Pearson as 2026-27 Secretary. Staff Council affirmed the motion and elected Elizabeth.

Chelsea shared a decision by the executive committee to pause the work of the Staff Regent Working Group given the current university climate and activities. The committee will compile documentation and notes for Staff Council to revisit the initiative in the future. The working group was thanked for their important work.

Jaime Basher reminded Staff Council to review the proposed changes from the Constitution and By-Laws Committee that were received via email. Questions should be directed to Jaime_Basher@baylor.edu. The changes will be voted upon at the May meeting.

The Advancement Committee shared that an online spirit shop has been developed in partnership with Hole in the Roof and is almost ready. A link for staff to shop will be distributed very soon.

Staff Council Chair-Elect Daniel Ramirez provided notes from Faculty Senate, including:

- The Senate engaged in conversation and pointed questions around recent budget decisions, including the potential to cut tuition remission.
- The Senate has formed a Financial Advisory Committee. Matthea Williams shared at the Faculty Senate meeting that Staff Council will likely be interested in joining. Faculty Senate is going to launch the committee as faculty-only this first year and then add staff representation next year.

April birthdays were recognized.

The meeting was adjourned by a motion from Luke Whiting at 11:07am.