

Tulane SPHTM Staff Council

Meeting Minutes

August 7, 2025

Present: Nichole Valenzuela, Brendan Carter, Akilesh Kandregula, Farhana Choudhury, Tom Auguston, Susan Barrera, Ben Bratcher, Phillip Williams, Amy Carreras, Cristina Miller, Daniella Fontana Bermudez, Michael Fox.

Absent: Carrie Moulder, Cassieta Trawick

Call to Order: 11:34 a.m.

1. Old Business

Return to office policy letter: The council continued discussion on the return-to-office letter addressing the new mandate. The letter has been extensively reviewed and revised based on comments from the previous meeting. Farhana indicated readiness to distribute the letter for signatures through Microsoft Teams and Microsoft Forms. Staff members are encouraged to review the letter and provide feedback by the end of next week. The letter will be sent to SAC (Tulane Staff Advisory Council) after signature collection. The return-to-office mandate goes into effect the Monday following the meeting. It was noted that other universities nationwide have implemented similar return-to-office mandates, with 8 out of 20 schools on a recent ASPPH meeting confirming similar policies.

2. New Business

Back to School Food Pantry Donation Drive: Staff Council will help host another student food pantry competition featuring the Golden Apple Award competition between departments/floors. Each department will designate a "homeroom teacher" to collect items. High-need items include oil, salt, pepper, and white rice. Competition details will be distributed once the final list is prepared. A celebration/recess party is planned for Wednesday, September 17th (time may change to 2:00-4:00 PM). Previous competitions noted strong participation.

VP of Facilities: Dr. Jeffrey Benjamin, VP of Facilities, is scheduled to attend the September 4th meeting to discuss facilities updates, ongoing projects, and how Staff Council can serve as a communication touchpoint. Topics will include downtown facility planning and potential staff council involvement and support.

3. Staff Council Committees

a. **Retreat:** The retreat is scheduled for Friday, October 3rd during fall break, 8:30 AM - 3:00 PM (breakfast starts at 8:30 AM). The Tulane Cancer Center has been selected as the venue. Quote is being finalized. The agenda and speakers are being arranged, with the possibility of reviving the popular sticker activity from previous years. Save the date will be distributed once the location is confirmed.

b. **Community Service/Outreach (Carrie Moulder):** No report provided.

c. **Health and Wellness (Nichole Valenzuela):** The Crescent City Connection Bridge Run/Walk is scheduled for Saturday, September 20th at 6:00 PM, starting on the West Bank. The 3.73-mile course crosses the bridge with an after-party at Fulton Alley. The committee is seeking a team of 10+ people for a reduced registration cost (~\$35-40). Contact Christina Miller for team registration. A Munch and Mingle event is planned for August 28th, from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM at Wave City Market, serving as a welcome back event for staff to meet with council members. The announcement will be published in next week's Tidewater Times.

d. **Staff Appreciation (Phillip Williams):** The committee is currently seeking a chair. Brendan and Nichole will oversee temporarily.

e. **Staff Concerns (Farhana Chaudhry):** See Old Business regarding the return-to-office letter.

4. Reports

a. Staff Advisory Council (Phillip Williams): The first TSAC meeting is scheduled for August 27th, in person at the Business School, Long Family Dining Room 460. The new TSAC President is Roz Butler from the Business School. The meeting location was selected for central accessibility and venue availability.

5. HR Announcements

Julio Diaz (Updates provided by Nichole Valenzuela on behalf of Julio Diaz):

a. Annual Safety Training Requirements are due September 1st and include Emergency Action Plan, Emergency Fire Preparedness, Portable Fire Extinguisher Safety, and Hazard Communication. Access through TuLearn with username/password, navigate to Menu → My Learning for modules.

b. Mandatory Training due September 15th includes 2025 Preventing Discrimination and Harassment Training and Shared Ancestry Awareness Training, also available through TuLearn. Supervisors receive lists of non-compliant staff after deadline.

c. Dependent Eligibility Audit is in progress, with required documents due September 9th.

d. Fall Tuition Waiver applications are open until September 2nd.

e. Floating Holidays: New allocation available through June 30, 2026.

f. Windows 10 Upgrade: Windows 10 support ending in October. Staff should coordinate with IT for Windows 11 upgrades.

6. Other Business

The meeting noted that a Lego workshop would follow for team building with new department representatives.

7. Action Items Recap

- Staff members to review return-to-office letter in Teams channel and provide feedback by the end of next week.
- Food pantry competition details to be distributed when the finalized list is ready.

- Department representatives to identify "homeroom teachers" for food drive.
- Save the date information for the October 3rd retreat to be sent out.
- Health and wellness events to be promoted to departments.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned to proceed with the Lego workshop.

Next Meetings:

- September 4, 2025 (VP of Facilities attending)
- October 2, 2025 • November 6, 2025
- December 4, 2025