

## System Office Staff Council Minutes

Monday, August 4, 2025

9:00am-11:00am

[Agenda](#)

[Zoom Recording](#)

### Representatives:

XNicole Goff (2024-2026) FY26 President (Present)

XGenevieve Bright (2023-2025) FY26 Vice President (Present)

XHailey Jo Moyle (2025-2027) Secretary (Present)

XRebecca Catlin (2025-2027) (Present)

Sarah Belmont (2024-2026)

XRaina Collins (2024-2026) (Present)

XChelsey Okonek (2024-2026) (Present)

Emilee Pruitt (2024-2026)

XAimee Sudbeck (2025-2027) (Present)

XJeremiah Youmans (2024-2026) (Present)

XMacDonald (2025-2027) (Present)

### Alternates:

Vacant

### Governance Support:

XNoel Romanovsky (Present)

Sharon Dayton

**Attendees:** Nicole Goff, Genevieve Bright, Hailey Jo Moyle, Rebecca Catlin, Raina Collins, Chelsey Okonek, Aimee Sudbeck, Jeremiah Youmans, Logan MacDonald, Noel Romanovsky

**Guest Speakers:** Brian Smentkowski

**Absent:** Sarah Belmont, Emilee Pruitt

## 1. Welcome & Attendance

Nicole Goff called the meeting to order and welcomed attendees. She offered special thanks to guest speaker Brian Smentkowski for joining, noting his limited availability due to back-to-back meetings. Nicole shared that the meeting would be recorded by Noel for documentation purposes.

A roll call was conducted, with several members confirming their attendance including Genevieve Bright, Hailey Jo Moyle, Jeremiah Youmans, and Logan MacDonald. A few members were noted as running late or out of office on vacation.

## **2. Agenda Review & Approval**

The meeting agenda was posted in the Zoom chat by Noel. Nicole asked members to review it and offer any additions or changes. No edits were suggested.

**Motion to approve the agenda:** Jeremiah Youmans

**Seconded by:** Raina Collins

**Motion passed unanimously.**

## **3. July Meeting Record**

Nicole explained that the July meeting took the form of an in-person retreat rather than a typical virtual session, so no formal minutes were produced. Instead, the retreat agenda and goal-setting documents were offered as the official record for that meeting.

**Motion to approve the July retreat agenda as official meeting record**

**Motion carried without objection.**

Nicole thanked attendees for their flexibility and participation during the meeting, especially given the Monday morning scheduling challenge.

## **4. Guest Speaker: Dr. Brian Smentkowski**

**Title:** Vice President & Chief Academic Officer, University of Alaska System

Brian began by expressing gratitude for the opportunity to connect with the Staff Council. He emphasized the value of regular, open dialogue between university leadership and staff, and commended the Council for fostering spaces where those conversations can happen.

Key points from Brian's remarks included:

- **Communication & Collaboration:** Brian shared that during recent campus visits and staff retreats, many staff voiced similar concerns—specifically, issues related to unclear expectations, communication breakdowns, and a general sense of vulnerability. He underscored the importance of building trust and ensuring that staff voices are heard.
- **“Work-Work Balance”:** In addition to work-life balance, Brian introduced the concept of “work-work balance,” stressing the need for clarity, support, and alignment across

teams.

- **Strategic Initiatives:**

- *System-Wide Attainment Framework (SAF)*: A roadmap to improve student outcomes across all UA campuses.
- *Students First Action Agenda*: A university-wide initiative focused on enhancing recruitment, retention, and graduation. Brian emphasized that these goals require shared responsibility across units and departments—not just leadership.

- **FAST Track Program:** Brian shared a successful model from a previous institution called FAST Track (Faculty and Staff Together), which started as a grassroots effort and eventually transformed campus culture. It encouraged collaboration and built trust, ultimately improving student success.

- **Call for Engagement:** Brian encouraged staff to continue sharing questions, ideas, and concerns—whether directly or through representatives like Nicole and Genevieve. He expressed a desire to attend Staff Council meetings more regularly and engage in sustained dialogue, not just one-time check-ins.

Nicole thanked Brian for his insights and reiterated that staff are welcome to submit feedback or questions to her or Genevieve between meetings. She noted that she and Genevieve meet monthly with Brian and will continue to bring Council concerns to those conversations.

## 5. Systemwide Data & Technology Collaboration

**Discussion initiated by:** Alex Slivka, CFO, University of Alaska Foundation

Alex asked about efforts to align data systems across the university—specifically, the integration of platforms like Salesforce and Snowflake. He inquired whether the system is moving toward greater data sharing between the campuses and the Foundation.

**Brian's response included:**

- Acknowledgment that data alignment is a current system priority
- Reference to the data warehouse initiative led by Ben Shire, which aims to establish consistent data definitions and improve accessibility across units
- Recognition of existing challenges related to system interoperability and inconsistent usage of tools like Salesforce

- An openness to exploring more dynamic and collaborative approaches to data access, including the potential role of artificial intelligence

Brian noted that while Salesforce is currently used for recruitment, the system is evaluating its long-term effectiveness and considering alternatives. He stressed that data should not just be retrieved on a one-off basis, but integrated into a more meaningful, ongoing process of institutional learning.

**Additional note:**

Rebecca Catlin shared that Financial Systems is working with a third-party vendor to improve data reporting and visualization tools—a project expected to take one to two years.

Brian closed by affirming his commitment to continuing the conversation, thanking Alex and Rebecca for their input, and promising to revisit related topics in upcoming meetings.

## **6. FY25 Recap & FY26 Goal Setting**

- Discussed [FY26 Kickoff Survey Results](#)

Nicole transitioned into a review of last year's accomplishments and a preview of FY26 goals.

**FY25 Highlights included:**

- Successful longevity reform, thanks to leadership from Genevieve
- Staff recognition efforts that were incorporated into compensation planning and communication

**FY26 Focus Areas:**

- Continued advocacy for competitive compensation
- Development of a system office brand identity, including possible logo creation
- Enhancements to onboarding and supervisor training programs
- Increased engagement during monthly meetings and virtual events

Nicole emphasized the importance of building on last year's momentum while remaining adaptable to evolving staff needs and institutional goals.

## **7. General Announcements & Updates**

- **FY26 Budget:** [Finalized and approved](#)
- **Healthcare & Wellness:** Programs restarted July 1; Personify wellness challenges will continue

- **Salary Increases:** Reflected in the August 8 paychecks
- **SOSC Meeting Organization Info:**
  - First Monday of every month @ 9:00am
  - [Google Drive- Meeting organization](#)
  - Will send out agendas week prior to meeting
  - Minutes and recording will be sent out after meeting including:
    - Longer minutes
    - Brief summary of meeting
- **HR Contact:** Staff were encouraged to route HR-related questions through Nicole or directly to Kim Washburn
- **Events and New Updates:**
  - September Book Swap- Date TBD
  - [September 4th- Board of Regents Meeting](#)

## 8. Committee & Staff Alliance Updates

### Staff Alliance:

- The recent retreat in Anchorage was described as productive, with FY26 goal alignment and strong leadership participation
- [The next Alliance meeting is scheduled for August 21](#) and will include updates from President Pitney, Brian Smentkowski, and Kim Washburn
- All staff are welcome to attend and listen in

### Morale & Events Committee:

- A meeting is scheduled for August 5th to begin planning a September event. More info to come
- The committee will lead engagement efforts for upcoming Staff Council activities
- Back by popular demand, **System Office Staff Council** will be hosting a book swap on **Tuesday, August 19th at 12:00pm** upstairs in the Sherman Carter Conference Room - 204 (Butrovich).

### [Staff Development Fund](#) – Update from Raina Collins:

- [Application form](#) is currently open
- New for FY26: Tuition waiver applicants can now go straight to the support form; a separate waiver submission is no longer needed
- The committee is working on organizing its budget and procedures to improve tracking and reporting

- A new volunteer, Sarah, joined the committee and brings over 20 years of university finance experience—an asset to the team's administrative capacity

## **9. Local Issues & Updates**

- a. Anchorage
  - i. Permanent Chancellor - search underway
- b. Fairbanks
  - i. Interim Provost- Charlene Stern (May 2025)
  - ii. Interim Chancellor- Ambassador Mike Sfraga (July 2025)
  - iii. UAF CIO - Brian Seiler (June 2025)
- c. Juneau
  - i. New Provost- Dr. Scott Billingsley (July 2025)
- d. System Office
  - i. Interim Chief Human Resources Officer - Nickole Conley (July 2025)

## **10. Closing & Adjournment**

Nicole closed the meeting by thanking all participants for their time and engagement. She reminded members to share follow-up questions or suggestions and reiterated the Council's commitment to transparency, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

## **Scripted Version of Minutes:**

The meeting begins with Nicole Goff thanking Brian Smentkowski for attending, acknowledging that he has several meetings lined up. She notes that Noel is recording the session and that Brian will be the first speaker once the meeting officially begins.

Nicole proceeds with attendance, calling on members including Genevieve Bright, Hailey Jo Moyle, Jeremiah Youmans, Logan MacDonald, and others. Some members are either running late or on vacation.

The agenda is shared in the chat by Noel, and Nicole prompts members to review it for any additions or revisions. Once reviewed, Jeremiah motions to adopt the agenda, and Raina seconds it.

During the meeting, Nicole Goff began by explaining that the minutes for July were unconventional because the group held a retreat rather than a formal meeting. As such, there were no traditional minutes to approve—only the agenda from the retreat, which focused on setting goals and discussing new positions. The group moved to approve this agenda as the official record. Nicole thanked everyone for attending, acknowledging the challenges of scheduling meetings on Monday mornings, and welcomed additional members who joined after the meeting had started. She then introduced guest speaker Brian Smentkowski, noting that he had limited time due to other meetings, but expressed hope that he could join future Staff Council meetings more regularly.

Brian Smentkowski, Vice President and Chief Academic Officer at the University of Alaska System Office, introduced himself and shared his appreciation for being invited to speak. He emphasized the importance of open, honest conversations within the university community and discussed his recent participation in staff retreats and small group meetings. From these experiences, he and Michelle Rizk identified recurring concerns among staff related to communication breakdowns, unclear expectations, and feelings of vulnerability. Brian expressed a strong commitment to fostering better communication and collaboration, not only across departments but also between leadership and staff. He highlighted the concept of "work-work balance" in addition to work-life balance, stressing the need to build trust and understanding among team members.

He also introduced the university's System-Wide Attainment Framework (SAF), along with the Students First Action Agenda—an initiative focused on student success through improved recruitment, retention, and graduation efforts. Brian pointed out that these goals cannot be achieved by any one unit or group alone, emphasizing the need for cross-functional collaboration and the dismantling of silos. Drawing from his experience, he described a program he launched at a previous institution called FAST Track (Faculty and Staff Together), which was initially met with resistance but ultimately led to a stronger community, improved morale, and better student outcomes. He concluded by encouraging staff to share feedback and ideas—either directly or through Staff Council—affirming his dedication to ongoing, meaningful conversations rather than one-off interactions.

Nicole Goff thanked Brian Smentkowski for his participation. She encouraged others to share any questions or thoughts, either during the session or afterward, through herself or Genevieve, suggesting an open channel of communication. Nicole also mentioned that she and Genevieve meet with Brian monthly and are considering inviting him to future discussions based on the value of their recent conversations.

The broader discussion turned toward data management and technological collaboration across the University of Alaska system. Alex Slivka, CFO for the University of Alaska Foundation,

raised questions about the use of platforms like Salesforce and Snowflake, asking whether there's a coordinated effort to improve data sharing between universities and the Foundation. In response, Brian Smentkowski described the ongoing data warehouse initiative led by Ben Shire. He emphasized the importance of establishing common data definitions and vocabularies, which are vital for ensuring consistent interpretation and application of data. Brian acknowledged challenges in system interoperability and human engagement with data sources, stressing the need for better alignment and communication.

He also noted that while Salesforce is currently used as a recruitment tool, there are ongoing evaluations of its effectiveness and alternative solutions, including the role of AI in enhancing these platforms. Brian closed by expressing a desire to create environments that foster deeper interaction with data, moving beyond one-off requests toward more dynamic and collaborative systems.

Brian Smentkowski wrapped up his portion of the meeting with a brief follow-up, promising to revisit a topic raised earlier by Alex Slivka during an upcoming meeting later that day. He emphasized his commitment to continuing the conversation and maintaining open communication, noting that he would circle back with updates. After Rebecca Catlin added that Financial Systems is working with an outside vendor to improve data reporting and visualization—an effort expected to take one to two years—Brian expressed appreciation for the update and signed off warmly, thanking everyone for their time and inviting future dialogue.

His exit was gracious and intentional, acknowledging he had overstayed his planned time but emphasizing the value of the interaction. He conveyed a strong sense of ongoing collaboration and a desire to remain engaged with the group moving forward.

Nicole Goff led the meeting by acknowledging absentees and introducing the agenda, with a focus on setting goals for FY26. She celebrated achievements from FY25, including longevity reform spearheaded by Genevieve and progress on staff recognition included in a compensation memo. The FY26 goals highlighted continued advocacy for compensation, refining system office branding and identity (including potential logo development), improvements to onboarding and supervisor training, and boosting engagement during monthly meetings and events.

Several logistical updates followed: reminders about the approved FY26 budget and the restart of healthcare benefits and wellness initiatives as of July 1, including continued efforts with Personify challenges. Staff were also informed that the August 8 paycheck will reflect newly approved salary increases. Nicole introduced organizational changes, noting that Staff Council meetings are scheduled for the first Monday of each month and that a new shared Google

Drive structure will provide access to agendas, minutes, recordings, and documents for each session.

She also flagged HR-related inquiries as a point of connection with Kim Washburn, who may attend future meetings and was identified as the go-to contact for staff questions. Nicole encouraged members to forward HR questions to her or Kim.

As part of ongoing business, she reiterated the intention to develop system office branding and identity, a project currently paused but expected to resume. Nicole and Genevieve's monthly meetings with Brian were highlighted as channels for sharing input and gathering updates. The Staff Alliance retreat in Anchorage was described as a productive space for setting FY26 goals and engaging with leadership. Staff are invited to attend the upcoming Staff Alliance meeting on August 21, which will feature updates from President Pitney, Brian, and Kim.

Finally, committee updates were touched on. While most committees are spring-focused, the Morale and Events Committee is expected to be active in the coming months, with a meeting scheduled for the next day to begin planning for a September event. Raina was asked to share any updates related to the Staff Development Fund.

Raina Collins provided a brief update on the Staff Development Fund, noting that both application forms are currently open and that Noel successfully resolved a broken link in Cornerstone during her absence. While no applications have been reviewed yet, she expects submissions in the coming weeks. A key procedural change this year is the automation of the tuition waiver process—applicants can now proceed directly to the support form without completing a separate waiver.

Raina mentioned ongoing budget work to help streamline and organize the committee's financial processes. She highlighted the addition of a new volunteer, Sarah, who has 20 years of university financial experience and is expected to bring consistency and expertise to the budgeting efforts. Her contribution marks a positive development in strengthening the committee's administrative backbone.