Council of University System Staff (CUSS)

Full Meeting Minutes
Date: September 9, 2025
Location: Virtual meeting hosted by Towson University

TLDR - Top 3 Takeaways from the Meeting

1. **Staff Communication & Transparency Are Key Priorities**
   The Executive Board emphasized concerns across campuses about **early communication and transparency** from leadership—especially on salary, benefit, and workload changes. These themes will anchor CUSS's upcoming report to the Board of Regents.
2. **Committee Membership & Professional Development Planning**
   Professional Development funding is available but no applications have been submitted, so members were urged to brainstorm ideas and promote participation.
3. **Emerging Issues for Future Action**
   Several items were flagged for continued follow-up, including potential changes to **tuition remission**, a **bylaws update**, and a proposal to **expand CUSS representation to regional center staff** (e.g., Shady Grove), with careful consideration of bargaining-unit implications.

Roll Call & Establishing Quorum

The meeting opened promptly with a formal roll call conducted by **Kevin Bruce (UMCES)**. Representatives from Bowie State, Coppin State, Frostburg, Salisbury, Towson, the University of Baltimore, University of Maryland Baltimore (UMB), University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC), and University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) confirmed their attendance. Representatives from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) and the University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC) were absent.
With nine institutions represented—exceeding the seven required (50% plus one) under CUSS bylaws—**quorum was established** and the meeting proceeded as an official session.

Welcome to Towson University

Andrew Rosenblum, Vice Chair of the Towson University (TU) Staff Senate, welcomed attendees and reaffirmed TU's commitment to staff communication, recognition, and constructive shared governance.

Towson University **President Mark Ginsberg** followed with a keynote welcome.
He characterized TU as an "engine of opportunity" and a **public university for the public good**, highlighting several institutional milestones:

- TU received **its highest-ever volume of student applications** for the fall semester.
- The university achieved a **91% student retention rate**, a figure comparable to top national institutions.
- Approximately **60% of TU's student population identifies as members of minority groups**, and roughly **one-quarter are first-generation college students**.

President Ginsberg also acknowledged the fiscal realities confronting USM institutions, citing recent state budget reductions of approximately seven percent and the ongoing need to balance cost management with investments in staff and student success.
He closed by thanking staff across the USM system for their service and dedication, remarking that staff are "the glue that holds the university together" during times of challenge.

Call to Order

Chair **Roy Prouty** officially called the meeting to order following confirmation of quorum.

- **Approval of Agenda** – The agenda was presented and approved by unanimous consent with no additions or modifications.
- **Approval of Previous Minutes** – Members reviewed the draft minutes from the prior meeting.

Following the established practice, Kevin Bruce outlined the documentation cycle: draft minutes are posted within a week, members have an additional week for comments or addendums, and final approval occurs at the next monthly meeting before publication on the CUSS website.

Reports

a. Executive Board (Officers)

Chair's Report – Roy Prouty
Roy recapped his participation in several key governance activities:

Student Council Onboarding at Towson –
Roy attended a pilot onboarding program for student leaders. While he praised their enthusiasm, he observed that many participants lacked a clear agenda or articulated goals. He suggested that CUSS could consider offering guidance or joint programming in the future to strengthen shared governance across councils.

Chancellor's Council Meeting at IMET –
Roy joined the Chancellor, vice chancellors, and presidents of all USM institutions for a roundtable update. Presidents shared campus highlights and challenges. Roy conveyed staff concerns about **limited transparency in decisions affecting salaries, benefits, and position**

freezes, stressing the importance of improved communication to ensure that staff are informed and included in decision-making where appropriate.

He also reported on the tragic **UMES student fatalities** from a recent car accident and led a discussion about how CUSS might acknowledge such events. Members weighed the value of expressing condolences against the precedent such actions might set for future tragedies. The group agreed to remain sensitive while avoiding commitments that might be difficult to maintain consistently.

Regional Center Representation –
Roy noted that the Executive Director of the Universities at Shady Grove asked whether staff from regional centers (Shady Grove, Southern Maryland, Hagerstown) could be included in CUSS activities. Members agreed to research the matter further and revisit it in an upcoming meeting.

Other Officer Reports

- **Kevin Bruce** reported no new developments beyond his facilitation of meeting logistics.
- **Meredith Carpenter** confirmed that **systemwide professional development funding** has been approved, though no applications had yet been submitted.

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b. Standing Committees

Committee assignments remain in progress. Members were reminded to confirm their participation during breakout sessions so that chairs can balance institutional representation and workload across committees.

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c. Chancellor’s Liaison

No report was presented for this meeting.

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d. Campus Updates

Representatives from each USM institution shared current developments and staff-related news.

Bowie State University –
Staff reported a strong start to the semester, with high engagement in student support initiatives and campus events. Despite technical difficulties, representatives conveyed optimism about ongoing staff-driven programs.

Coppin State University –
Vincent Fields reported on leadership transitions and emphasized maintaining active staff representation in governance during this period of organizational adjustment.

Frostburg State University –
Representatives Amy, Kim, and Sarah described an energetic start to the semester but noted **significant staffing shortages and workload increases**. Staff members are covering multiple roles to meet operational needs, highlighting ongoing resource challenges.

Salisbury University –
Lisa Gray confirmed robust participation from SU’s delegation, though some attendees experienced audio difficulties. Salisbury is reviewing and clarifying **election procedures for staff governance representatives** to ensure transparency and broader engagement.

Towson University –
Towson staff expressed pride in hosting the CUSS meeting and reported strong enrollment growth. University leadership remains focused on enhancing staff recognition and aligning shared governance with institutional priorities.

University of Baltimore –
Representatives Karen and Kara reported **stable operations and active committee participation**. Staff governance efforts continue to emphasize consistent communication across campus units.

University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) –
Anthony, Nicole, Danielle, and Antoinette discussed ongoing **staff transitions and onboarding** efforts to maintain service continuity as the academic year begins.

UMBC –
Roy, and Michael described a **high-energy start to the semester**, noting leadership transitions and reiterating staff concerns about workload and transparency in administrative decisions.

University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) –
Meredith Carpenter, Suzanne, and Sister Maureen confirmed approval of **new professional development funding** and encouraged applications. Staff governance continues to focus on advocacy, professional growth, and support for upcoming campus events.

University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) –
Kevin Bruce (Maryland Sea Grant) announced that UMCES will hold a **systemwide staff retreat on September 26th**, conducted in a hybrid format with unit-based conference room connections to Zoom.
The retreat will include the **presentation of staff awards by the UMCES President**.
Kevin also reported that UMCES has opened a **new administrative office in Annapolis** to complement its Horn Point facility, expanding the institution’s presence on both sides of the Chesapeake Bay.

Additionally, **Maryland Sea Grant secured new national funding to support staff positions**, ensuring stability and creating growth opportunities.

Following Kevin's update, **Nina Lamba (IMET/UMCES)** described activities at the **Institute of Marine and Environmental Technology (IMET)**.
She explained that IMET is a **jointly governed research partnership between UMCES, UMB, and UMBC**, with additional participation from Towson University.
The facility also houses a **business incubator that leverages wet lab space for entrepreneurship and innovation**.
As Assistant Director, Nina supports **entrepreneurship, innovation, and economic development initiatives**, helping translate research into practical outcomes for the region.

University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) –
No representatives were present due to the recent student tragedy. The council extended condolences to the UMES community.

University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC) –
No representatives attended and no updates were shared.

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e. USM Working Group

Updates from the **Civic Education Data Strategy**, **Diversity & Inclusion**, **Education Policy & Student Life**, and **Finance** subcommittees were deferred to a future meeting.

Business Items Requiring Council Action

The council addressed several key items of business:

1. **Professional Development** – Meredith Carpenter invited ideas to promote the newly approved funding and encouraged campuses to share best practices for staff participation.

2. **CUSS Report to the Board of Regents** – Roy Prouty previewed the report he will deliver to the Regents, emphasizing concerns about communication, transparency, and workload while including lighter updates such as changes to dining options to balance the narrative.

3. **Joint Councils Meeting** – Planning continues for a collaborative meeting with student and faculty governance bodies. Members discussed potential shared agenda topics and opportunities for cross-council collaboration.

4. **Proposed Changes to CUSS Bylaws** – Shannon and Lisa are drafting revisions to clarify procedures and expectations for council operations. Formal proposals will be circulated for review once complete.
5. **Tuition Remission** – Members discussed questions about tuition remission policies, including a case raised by Frostburg. The topic will remain under review for future action.

Committee Breakouts and Lunch

Members joined breakout sessions to finalize committee membership rosters and begin work on annual objectives.
Chairs were asked to confirm balanced representation from all campuses.
Committee chairs will submit written notes to CUSS officers by the **16th of the month** to ensure timely completion of meeting minutes.

Reconvene and Committee Reports

Upon reconvening, committees provided brief oral reports summarizing membership confirmations and preliminary action items.
Detailed written minutes will be submitted to the Executive Board for inclusion in the official record.

LAPC Notes-9-9-2025

Discussion regarding bylaws, will schedule a meeting between now and next meeting to discuss any feedback received from members. Will remind members when return to large group to submit feedback to Lisa or Shannon.

Advocacy Day-Shannon asked for two members of the committee to lead the charge for organizing the day. Discussed a breakout session with USMO at JCD. Discussed the logistics of organizing the event, making appointments, assigning groups, assigning a lead for each group and ensuring that there are faculty, staff and students in each group.

No volunteers, will revisit at October meeting.

CUSS Awards & Outreach

In Attendance:

- Co-chair Brian Jara
- Suzanne Ashour-Bailey

- Sheila Chase
- Danielle Hill (NEW member!)
- Kara Kauffman
- Siobhan Keplinger
- Sister Maureen Schrimpe
- Antoinette Shannon (NEW member!)

BOR Staff Awards:

- USM schools are working to adjust to the new timeline; it shortens the nomination period for all schools.
- Brian & Cathy are hosting two virtual meetings in September for schools' awards committees.
- We continue to explore streamlining the grading process.

CUSS Newsletter:

- October issue planning is underway.
- Issue articles:
    - CUSS Chair entry
    - A&O Co-chairs entry
    - Question: While we align the new newsletter schedule with celebrating BOR Staff Awardees, which issue should become the annual "Awards Issue"? (Answer: July)
    - Question: This year only, we may need to use two issues to celebrate 2025 Awardees (Oct? Mar?) as well as 2026 Awardees (July).
    - Committee is exploring how to prioritize USM institutional highlights / atypical stories vs regular updates. What merits newsletter inclusion?

Staff Resource & Special Projects Subcommittee

In Attendance

- Kevin Bruce (MDSG) – Secretary (facilitator for this session)
- Kelly Cowger
- Karen Karmiol (UBalt)
- Sara Wilhelm (Frostburg State University)
- Trish Johnson (BSU)
- Nicole Nash (UMB)
- Amy Nightengale (FSU)

Solicitation of Unit Suggestions

Members agreed to request suggestions from each campus/unit for new issues or projects the subcommittee should address. A questionnaire will be developed to gather proposed topics for subcommittee work and updates on implementation of previously passed USM policies.

Review of Prior USM Actions & Compliance

The committee revisited past USM-wide actions to ensure campus compliance:

- Duplicative Fees – Confirm whether campuses have eliminated prohibited duplicate fees.
- Ombudsman Requirement – Determine if each campus has established an ombudsperson or equivalent.
- Leave Bank / PTO Sharing – Assess whether institutions have created voluntary leave-sharing programs.
- Staff Senate Chair Compensation – Confirm which campuses provide stipends for staff senate chairs.
- Members discussed gathering unit-level reports to identify campuses still out of compliance or slow to implement these initiatives.

Budget Challenges & Cost-Saving Practices
Members shared strategies their campuses are using to cope with statewide budget constraints:
- Hiring Freezes – Used at several campuses to reduce payroll costs.
- Remote Work & Building Closures – Some campuses reduce summer utility costs by remote work Fridays and shutting down selected buildings.
- Travel Freezes – UBalt implemented travel restrictions requiring higher-level approvals.
- Position Redesign – Vacant positions are sometimes reclassified to address workload changes.

Ombudsperson Updates
Updates by campus:

- MDSG: Has a contractual ombudsperson reporting directly to the president.
- Frostburg State: No ombudsperson; ongoing efforts to contract a retired staff member pending training and HR guidance.
- BSU: Ombudsperson role combined with Equity & Compliance within the General Counsel's office.
- UMB: Ombudsman office exists but is not widely known among staff.
- Other Campuses: Mixed awareness and implementation; College Park reportedly has a full-time program.

Discussion emphasized the need for clear communication and independence of ombuds roles.

Workday Implementation
Kevin noted two implementation groups:

- Maryland Connect (BSU, CSU, FSU, Salisbury, UBalt)
- Elevate (College Park, UMES, UMSIs)

Experiences varied; Elevate delayed launch by a year, which reduced rollout issues.

Reporting & Next Steps
Kevin will prepare a Questionnaire follow-up on leave banks, duplicative fees, chair compensation, and ombudsman status to be distributed to campuses for additional input and compliance checks.

Good of the Order

Roy Prouty reopened discussion on including **regional center staff** (Shady Grove, Southern Maryland, Hagerstown) in CUSS representation.
Members acknowledged the importance of giving these staff a system-level voice while also noting potential complications if bargaining-unit employees were involved.
The council agreed to gather additional information, review by-laws, and revisit the topic at the upcoming University of Baltimore meeting.

Adjournment

With all business concluded, the meeting was adjourned.
Chair Prouty thanked Towson University for hosting and expressed appreciation to all participants for their engagement and thoughtful contributions.

Next Steps and Reminders

- Committee chairs to submit breakout session notes by the 16th of the month.
- Members are encouraged to begin planning agenda items and potential questions for the next meeting's presidential guest speaker.
- Professional development funding applications are open; campuses should promote opportunities widely.