

Council of University System Staff (CUSS)

Monthly General Body Meeting — Meeting Minutes

Date:	Monday, March 10, 2026
Time:	10:00 AM – 12:30 PM
Format:	Virtual (Zoom)
Chair:	Roy Prouty
Secretary / Minutes:	Kevin Bruce (MDSG)
Co-facilitators:	Meredith Carpenter (UMCP), Kelly Cowger
Minutes prepared by:	Kevin Bruce
Distribution:	CUSS General Body, Campus Points of Contact

I. ATTENDANCE & QUORUM

Quorum was confirmed by Kevin Bruce prior to the start of the official meeting.

II. CALL TO ORDER & AGENDA APPROVAL

Chair Roy Prouty called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM. He noted that the February meeting was replaced by the Joint Council's Advocacy Day and thanked participants for their involvement.

Motion to approve agenda: Made by Siobhan Keplinger; seconded by Kelly Cowger. Motion carried without dissent.

III. APPROVAL OF PRIOR MEETING MINUTES

Chair Prouty invited members to review the January 2026 meeting minutes, compiled by Kevin Bruce. Members noted the minutes were well-prepared.

Motion to approve January 2026 meeting minutes: Made by Siobhan Keplinger; seconded by LaVel Jones. Motion carried without dissent.

IV. NEW MEMBER INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Prouty invited new CUSSmembers to introduce themselves. Gigi Giovannini-Ippolito (University of Baltimore, Office of Advancement and External Relations) introduced herself. She has also been participating in the Monday legislative calls. She was welcomed by the group.

V. CHAIR'S REPORT — Roy Prouty

A. Recent Reports Delivered

- **February 12, 2026 – Board of Regents Report:** Delivered at the first (and only virtual) Board of Regents meeting. The next Board of Regents meeting is April 17 at College Park; Meredith Carpenter will deliver the CUSSreport on Roy's behalf, as Roy will be attending his sister's wedding.
- **February 2 and March 2, 2026 – Chancellor's Council Reports:** Two reports were delivered. The March report was comparatively brief, given the short interval between meetings.

B. Key Points Raised Across Recent Reports

- CUSSidentified Board of Regents Staff Awards finalists.
- CUSSplanned and conducted the 2026 Joint Council's Advocacy Day.
- CUSSis currently administering the State of Staff Shared Governance Survey.
- Staff are eager to contribute to the salary and compensation policy study being conducted at the system level.
- Staff are aware of raises that AFSCME-bargained counterparts are receiving.
- CUSShopes to limit instances of duplicative fees across the system.

- CUSS hopes to ensure that staff can engage with Ombuds services at each campus.
- **ICE/Immigration Concerns:** Staff and students have expressed growing concern about a lack of information regarding ICE enforcement activities on or around campus communities. Roy noted anecdotal reports indicating staff felt unprepared and unsure of their rights. Several campuses (notably UMBC) subsequently issued communications to help employees understand their roles and rights. The Chancellor's Council and campus presidents acknowledged the need for improved communication. Roy emphasized that while information exists, it may need to be updated and redistributed more clearly.

C. Constitutional Changes Reminder

The CUSS General Body (2024–2025 cycle) approved changes to the CUSS Constitution, taking effect this fall. Key changes: (1) CUSS representatives must be elected from all eligible staff at each campus; (2) at least one CUSS representative must sit on the campus shared governance body. Campus senates with questions about interpreting the updated constitutional language are encouraged to contact the Executive Board.

D. State of Staff Shared Governance Survey

The annual survey for calendar year 2025 has been distributed to campus points of contact and staff shared governance leaders. The survey will close in early April. Results will be delivered to the Chancellor, Board of Regents, and campus presidents. The survey is administered at the Chancellor's request and factors into campus president performance reviews.

Action: Members are encouraged to complete the survey and forward it to eligible staff members at their campuses who may have been missed in the initial distribution.

E. Acknowledgements

- **Awards & Outreach Committee:** Thanks to Kathy (Catherine Fu), Brian Jara, and team for completing the Board of Regents Staff Awards process.
- **Joint Council's Advocacy Day Organizers:** Thanks to Kim, Shannon James, and Lisa Gray. Feedback on this year's Advocacy Day has been extremely positive.
- **Ad Hoc Committee on Tuition Remission:** Roy acknowledged that he had not yet followed up with those identified at the January meeting to participate in this committee. He committed to reaching out after the conclusion of this meeting.

Action (Roy Prouty): Follow up with ad hoc tuition remission committee members after this meeting.

F. Cycle Update

The CUSS cycle starts and ends in August. The group is now more than halfway through the 2025–2026 cycle. Members were encouraged to reflect on accomplishments and to

share ideas for how CUSS could be improved—either via conversation at upcoming meetings or by email to the Executive Board.

VI. EXECUTIVE BOARD REPORTS

Meredith Carpenter, Kevin Bruce, Trish Johnson, and Kelly Cowger each indicated they had no specific new items to report, but acknowledged their ongoing work supporting operations behind the scenes.

VII. STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Awards & Outreach — Brian Jara & Catherine Fu

- All Board of Regents Staff Awards communications have gone out. Recipient notifications were sent first, followed by nominees who were not selected.
- One institution shared award news before all communications were complete; the committee will continue streamlining procedures.
- Schools will receive the 2027 awards packet by May 1.
- The next newsletter (March issue) is in preparation. Going forward, awardees will be highlighted in the July issue.

B. Staff Resources & Special Projects — Dave Gutoskey & Kelly Cowger

- All campuses have now completed the Special Projects survey that was re-sent by Kevin Bruce.
- The committee plans to review survey results during the day's committee breakout session and determine priorities for the remainder of the cycle.

C. Legislative Affairs & Policy — Shannon James & Lisa Gray

- Joint Council's Advocacy Day took place approximately one month ago and went well. Shannon reported positive interactions with legislators.
- A post-Advocacy Day survey has been distributed. As of the meeting, only 15 responses had been received. Members were encouraged to complete the survey if they attended.

Action (Roy Prouty): Reach out to QCIF and USMSC to encourage their members to complete the Advocacy Day feedback survey.

D. Chancellor's Liaison Report — George Samuel (USMO)

- **USM Website Revamp:** The USM system office is undergoing a major website redesign. Some CUSS members have been engaged in the project. Launch is expected soon. Members who have not been included and wish to participate should contact George Samuel.

- **Employee Benefits Division (EBD) Billing Issues:** Some contractual and certain-category employees who pay health insurance premiums directly to EBD are behind on payments due to billing errors and inconsistent reminder mailings. An audit has surfaced a large volume of outstanding invoices. USM leadership is working with EBD and campus benefits coordinators to address the situation. Affected employees should be directed to their campus benefits coordinator.

VIII. CAMPUS UPDATES

Bowie State University (BSU) — LaVel Jones

- USM Women's Forum will be hosted at Bowie State University on **March 26**. Registration is required.
- BSU and UMCP are hosting a Social Justice Alliance event at College Park on **April 10**.
- A National Panel Discussion on Mental Health and Bail Reform (featuring attorney Ben Crump), originally scheduled in February, was postponed due to weather and has been rescheduled to **March 24** at Bowie State University.
- A Career Fair will be held at Bowie State University on **April 8**. Students and others are welcome to attend.

Coppin State University — Sheila Chase

- Coppin is preparing for its upcoming Middle States accreditation visit. The institution's five strategic priorities are: (1) become a top university of choice, (2) improve holistic student development and completion, (3) strengthen brand and reputation in urban higher education, (4) become a great place to work, and (5) enhance teaching and research excellence.
- Staff are invited to join Kahoot-based accreditation learning sessions coordinated by the Provost and Academic Affairs.

Frostburg State University (FSU) — Amy Nightengale

- A new president has been selected and will begin on **July 1**.

Salisbury University — Lisa Gray & Kelly Cowger

- A new Management Development Academy has been launched. Candidates were identified in February; the first session begins in March and runs through November. The program offers in-person and online workshops covering topics such as leadership, communication, social styles, and management skills. This program was long-requested by the Staff Senate.
- A VP of Student Affairs search is nearing completion; the incoming VP is expected to begin July 1.

Towson University — Benjamin Crull

- Towson's first Wellbeing Summit will be hosted later in the semester, focused on supporting campus-wide well-being.
- The Staff Senate ratified updates to the CUSDelegation election process.

University of Baltimore (UBalt) — Kara Kauffman

- Middle States accreditation visit is taking place the week of the meeting (Monday–Wednesday).
- UBalt's SGA recently passed a resolution calling for greater campus transparency regarding ICE enforcement activity and communications. Leadership's response is still pending.

University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) — Anthony Weldon, Jr.

- UMB has announced the Vibrancy Initiative, a partnership with Wexford Science and Technology. The project will develop housing, commercial and retail space, outdoor recreation facilities, and a pharmacy learning program in the south and north parts of campus. Wexford will contribute \$263 million; UMB will contribute \$36 million. No start date has been announced.

UMBC — Michael T. Walsh & Catherine Fu

- UMBC is currently undergoing its Middle States accreditation visit.
- UMBC's non-exempt Staff Senate President circulated a survey to gauge staff feelings and interests regarding AI use. This survey was focused on administrative professionals; it is unclear whether the exempt Staff Senate received the same outreach.
- UMBC will host the next CUSDelegation meeting on **April 14**, in person.

University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) — Meredith Carpenter

- The Campus Senate's Staff Affairs Committee (along with Faculty Affairs and Student Affairs Committees) is reviewing a proposal for a Staff Emeritus position at the university. The proposal will proceed to a full Senate vote after committee review.

UMGC — Kathleen Hebbel

- UMGCC has received reaffirmation of its Middle States accreditation, concluded after a process that began in 2023. The Commission recognized the university's learner-centered, data-informed culture; commitment to growth and innovation; and use of performance indicators to drive equity and consistency. The next review will be in 2032.

IX. USM WORKING GROUP REPORTS

A. Diversity & Inclusion Working Group — Jen Walsh

- The group discussed campus guidance regarding ICE activity, echoing points raised by Chair Prouty. Existing guidance is often too buried to be useful; students report not knowing their rights.
- The group discussed whether email is the appropriate channel for communicating with students about rights and safety information.
- House Bill 0649 was reviewed.
- Campuses shared policies around preferred name usage; the group discussed improving guidance and accessibility of these policies across the system.

B. Education Policy & Student Life and Safety Committee

- A range of new undergraduate, master's, and PhD programs were approved. Full listings are available in the meeting agenda.

C. Finance Committee

- The Finance Committee met; discussion focused on campus improvement initiatives. No items were identified as directly impacting staff.
- **Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML):** The Maryland state PFML law takes effect **July 1, 2026**. Board of Regents benefit policies are being updated to align with state law. Updated policies are expected to be approved at the April 17 Board of Regents meeting. Under the new law, employees on qualifying leave will receive paid leave at their regular rate of pay, without being required to draw down their personal or sick leave. Further communications from HR departments are expected in the April–May timeframe.

Action: Watch for official PFML communications from HR and campus benefits coordinators.

X. GUEST PRESENTATION — UMCES President Fernando Miralles-Wilhelm (FMW)

Kevin Bruce introduced UMCES President and USM Vice Chancellor for Sustainability Fernando Miralles-Wilhelm, who joined to provide an institutional and system-wide update.

Financial Update

President Miralles-Wilhelm reported that UMCES took its largest budget cut in years during his first year (2024–2025), impacting the entire system. The current fiscal year outlook is cautiously more optimistic. He emphasized the need to find more efficient ways to invest in people, programs, and activities going forward.

Chesapeake Bay Restoration

UMCES announced record-breaking oyster restoration results in 2025 — the largest oyster production in 41 years, both for restoration and commercially. The Chesapeake Bay restoration work is recognized internationally as a leading model for ecosystem recovery.

Sustainability Initiative

UMCES is conducting a system-wide environmental footprint inventory and developing plans to reduce consumption and work toward net-zero emissions. He emphasized that this is a system-wide, all-hands effort involving staff, faculty, and students.

Global Engagement

UMCES is expanding its research presence internationally, with work underway in Sydney Harbour (Australia), Tokyo Bay (Japan), Guanabara Bay in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), and the Middle East (currently paused).

UMCES Collaboratorium

In response to a question from Kevin Bruce, President Miralles-Wilhelm described the newly-opened Collaboratorium at the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory in Solomons Island. The facility opened in December 2025 or January 2026. It is designed as a space for community engagement, citizen workshops, and participatory science — where researchers work with diverse members of the public to co-develop environmental science in a transparent, community-connected way. He described it as a nationally and globally distinctive approach.

President Miralles-Wilhelm encouraged CUSS members to see themselves as integral partners in the USM's mission and thanked staff for their contributions.

XI. BREAK

A 10-minute break was taken from approximately 11:17 AM to 11:25 AM.

XII. NEW & OLD BUSINESS

A. Professional Development Funds

Chair Prouty noted that the system office earmarks approximately \$10,000 annually for CUSS professional development. These funds have historically not been fully utilized. He proposed using the funds to host a CUSS orientation/retreat in August, prior to the start of the new cycle. The event would likely take place in Baltimore (centrally located), run approximately 3–4 hours, and include some level-setting and expectation-setting for both new and returning members, along with catering and a social activity (e.g., the National Aquarium or Topgolf).

Discussion points from members:

- Kelly Cowger raised the question of who would attend, noting that August is transition period between cycles.
- Roy responded that campuses would determine who attends, up to a maximum headcount; new incoming members would be a priority audience.
- Trish Johnson (BSU) requested that outgoing members from the current cycle also be included.
- Dave Gutoskey expressed support for the idea and noted that August scheduling could be challenging due to staff vacations and fall preparations; encouraged planners to account for this.
- Sheila Chase suggested early August to avoid conflict with the fall semester.

Consensus: No motion was required at this time. The Executive Board received broad approval to develop a formal proposal, to be shared at the April meeting or circulated by email, before submission to the system office.

Action (Executive Board): Develop a formal proposal for a CUSSretreat in August 2026, including date options, headcount, budget outline, and agenda framework.

B. Tuition Remission Policy — Ad Hoc Committee Update

Chair Prouty briefly noted that this item was born out of a sudden change to the tuition remission eligibility for a Frostburg education program, which highlighted that program eligibility for tuition remission can be altered solely by agreement between a campus president and the USM Chancellor, without input from shared governance. The ad hoc committee's charge is to explore whether shared governance bodies should have a formal advisory role in such decisions. No report was available as the committee had not yet met. Roy committed to contacting committee members after the meeting.

Action (Roy Prouty): Contact ad hoc tuition remission committee members to scope and schedule the committee's work.

C. Joint Council's Advocacy Day (JCAD) Mission Statement

The proposed JCAD mission statement document (drafted with input from Andy Clark, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Government Relations) was discussed. Lisa Gray noted that the document reads too specifically for a single legislative session and should be revised to be more general and evergreen — appropriate for any year's Advocacy Day. She recommended removing session-specific examples and replacing them with broader standing topics (e.g., operating capital budget, funding disruptions, student access and affordability). Shannon James expressed skepticism that a mission statement alone would align all three councils (staff, faculty, students) and suggested involving other councils before CUSSadopts a resolution.

After discussion, members agreed that the document should be revised before circulation to other councils.

Action (Roy Prouty): Revise and shorten the JCAD mission statement document, removing session-specific content. Bring a revised version back for further discussion. No action required at this meeting.

D. AI Policy Discussion

Chair Prouty invited members to share any thoughts on how AI policies are affecting staff at their campuses. Key points from the discussion:

- **UMGC:** Has rolled out a variety of AI trainings for all staff and faculty. Trainings cover theory and general capabilities but have not yet addressed day-to-day application. Staff are feeling somewhat overwhelmed.
- **UMBC:** The non-exempt Staff Senate president circulated a survey on AI interest among administrative professionals.
- **UBalt:** Has adopted BoodleBox as the institution's preferred AI tool and is encouraging staff and faculty to use it ethically and responsibly, including in instruction.
- **FSU:** Uses Microsoft Copilot (via Microsoft 365 subscription), which keeps data within the institution's Azure environment. Anecdotal confirmation that the system-level AI policy, when released, is expected to be broad guidance with individual institutions responsible for developing aligned policies.
- Roy Prouty noted that in IT and research computing, staff workflows are being significantly impacted by AI and productivity tools — this is not exclusively a classroom issue.

Action: No formal action at this time. Members are encouraged to send any further input to the Executive Board by email. Topic to remain on the agenda for future discussion.

E. Adoption of Bylaws Changes Memorandum — VOTE

The Legislative Affairs and Policy Committee developed substantive bylaws changes that were voted on and approved at the December 2025 meeting. The Executive Board drafted a memo (reviewed at this meeting) to communicate the changes to campus-level shared governance leaders. The remaining open question was the **effective date** of the changes.

Key provisions of the approved bylaws changes:

- The distinction between "alternate" and "primary" CUSRepresentatives is eliminated. All representatives are now simply "CUSRepresentatives."
- Apportionment based on campus size is eliminated. Every USM institution may send **up to 6 representatives** to CUS.

Discussion of the memo included feedback from Lisa Gray that a paragraph addressing campus-level concerns about voting appeared to solicit feedback on the decision rather than communicate a policy change. Members agreed to strike that paragraph and link to meeting minutes instead.

Lisa Gray also identified a typo: "March 10, 2025" in the second paragraph should read "March 10, 2026."

Motion: To set **August 1, 2026** as the effective date for the bylaws changes approved at the December 2025 meeting.

Moved by: Lisa Gray | **Seconded by:** Frank Bowen

Vote: 29–31 eligible votes cast in favor; 0 against. Kevin Bruce (as host) verbally

confirmed UMCES's approval on the record.

Result: Motion passed.

Action (Roy Prouty & Meredith Carpenter): Revise memo to correct the date typo, strike the identified paragraph, and add a link to meeting minutes. Convert to PDF and distribute to campus-level shared governance leaders and CUSSpoints of contact.

Note: Roy Prouty departed after this item to attend a Middle States meeting. Meredith Carpenter assumed facilitation for the remainder of the meeting.

XIII. COMMITTEE BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Breakout sessions were held from approximately 11:59 AM to 12:25 PM. Members self-selected into the following committees:

- **Awards & Outreach:** Catherine Fu, Brian Jara, Danielle Hill, Siobhan Keplinger, Rosetta Price, Sheila Chase, Antoinette Shannon
- **Legislative Affairs & Policy:** Anthony Weldon Jr., April Parvzian, Benjamin Crull, Deanna Cerquetti, Gigi Giovannini-Ippolito, Kathleen Hebbel, LaVel Jones, Lisa Gray, Victoria Cardoni, Frank Bowen, Anthony Skevakis, Shannon [James]
- **Staff Resources & Special Projects:** Kelly Cowger, Jennifer Walsh, Kevin Bruce, Karen Karmioli, Sara Wilhelm, Amy Nightengale, Trish Johnson, Dave Gutoskey

Following breakout sessions, committee chairs were reminded to submit written reports to the CUSSGmail account (CUSSUSM@gmail.com).

Awards & Outreach Committee

Present: Catherine Fu, Brian Jara, Sheila Chase, Danielle Hill, Kara Kauffman, Siobhan Keplinger, Rosetta Price, Antoinette Shannon

Awards: 2026 Staff Award Recipients and Honorable Mentions have been notified by Chancellor's Office and CUSS, respectively. Co-chairs waiting to hear back from USMO to discuss enhancements to online awards rating portal. Schools will receive 2027 Call for Nominations by 5/1/2026.

Outreach: Finalizing the March 2026 issue to be released at end of month.

- Chair's Update
- Feature article: Advocacy Day— Cathy wrote a first-person account, including photos and/or videos.
- Staff resource: PFMLA-- Antoinette submitted this.
- Digital Accessibility FYI-- Suzanne submitted this week.

- BOR Awards: moving forward the summer (July) issue will become the annual Staff Awards issue.

Legislative Affairs & Policy

Advocacy day feedback from LAPC, mostly positive. Some felt legislators in the room was more productive than meetings at their offices, other felt the opposite. Majority would like to see the format from this year moving forward. Kudos to Kim and USMO. Would like to see the same involvement with planning from USMO (scheduling legislator to room 180, lunch, logistics). Participation from CUSF, CUSS and USMSC was disappointing, would like to see larger presence moving forward.

We would like to have someone from USMO to provide more details on the new Family Medical Leave act at April or May meeting. George gave a summary but an overview of the details would be helpful (time, how to apply, who is eligible, is it the same for all institutions, etc).

Would also like an update on the USM salary study, this started two years ago and we have not been updated in quite some time.

Potential minimum wage increase, if passed, how will USM and the institutions handle this? Are administration and leaderships talking about it?

Bereavement leave policy-how does each institutions policy function? Do they have to use sick time or annual leave or is bereavement its own type of leave? Would like to send email or have a discussion.

Special Projects Committee Post-Breakout Discussion (Kelly Cowger)

Kelly Cowger noted that the Special Projects survey data had some gaps: UMES was missing, and one institution appeared twice (with conflicting data on salary matters). Kevin Bruce agreed to review and fill in missing entries from the original data. Kelly proposed adding an AI policy question to the next outreach, asking whether institutions have a staff-specific or campus-wide AI policy. Discussion confirmed that the system-level AI policy is still anticipated; FSU's IT department has issued interim guidance based on what is expected from the system.

Action (Kelly Cowger): Send Special Projects Word document to Kevin Bruce for data cleanup. Draft AI policy question to include in next institution outreach.

Action (Next Meeting): Discuss how staff specifically are using AI at their institutions, what guardrails or training are in place, and what additional information would be useful.

XIV. CLOSING BUSINESS

Next Meeting

Date: April 14, 2026

Location: UMBC (in person)

Details to be communicated as soon as available.

Reminders

- Committee chairs: Please send your written reports to **CUSUSM@gmail.com**.
- Points of contact: Also send written reports to the same address.

Motion to Adjourn

Motion to close the meeting: Made by Frank Bowen (jfbowen); seconded by Lavelle [Jones] and April [Parvizian].

Meeting adjourned at approximately 12:27 PM.

ACTION ITEMS SUMMARY

#	Action Item	Responsible	Due
1	Follow up with ad hoc tuition remission committee members to scope and schedule work	Roy Prouty	After meeting
2	Reach out to QCIF and USMSC to encourage completion of Advocacy Day feedback survey	Roy Prouty	ASAP
3	Revise and shorten the JCAD mission statement (remove session-specific content)	Roy Prouty	Before April meeting
4	Develop formal proposal for CUSSretreat in August 2026	Executive Board	By April meeting
5	Revise bylaws memo (correct date typo, strike paragraph, add minutes link); convert to PDF and distribute to governance leaders and CUSSpoints of contact	Roy Prouty & Meredith Carpenter	ASAP
6	Complete and submit the State of Staff Shared Governance Survey (closes early April)	All members / campus leads	Early April

7	Send Special Projects Word doc to Kevin Bruce for data cleanup; draft AI policy question for next outreach	Kelly Cowger	Before April meeting
8	Committee chairs: Submit written committee reports to CUSUSM@gmail.com	All committee chairs	ASAP
9	Watch for PFML communications from HR/campus benefits coordinators (effective July 1, 2026)	All members	April–May 2026

Minutes compiled from Zoom closed captions • March 10, 2026 • Council of University System Staff (CUSS)

Draft — pending approval at the April 14, 2026 meeting