

NESS Meeting Minutes August 20, 2025

Attendance: Helena Dahlen, President; Barbara Ann Smith, VP; Crocetta Argento; Kelly Birch; Tammy Brown; Jenny Carr; Shirley Carrington; Brandy Darcey; Erica Davis; Samantha Drummond; Makeba Ellis; Cathy Fu; Justine Gonzales; Melessia Jasper; Shelly Johnson; Michele Kimery; Michele Mullins; Susy Pincheira; Kyle Pokorny; Teresa Reese; John Roemer; Sabrina Sapp; Nett Smith; Lisa Thomas; Amanda Turner; Terisa White.

Guests: *Valerie Sheares Ashby*, President; *Lynne Adams*, CHRO, Human Resources and Strategic Talent Management; *Kacey Hammel*, Chief of Staff to the President

Visit from Dr. Sheares Ashby and Lynne Adams about pay increases

Dr. Sheares Ashby

Two meetings with NESS leadership on August 5 and 13, 2025.

- She didn't make the decision to take away salary increases from us. She was unaware of our Confidential status and what that means, that state law forbids us from being part of the bargaining unit.
- She didn't realize that we had the expectation to receive the same salary increases that the non-exempt bargaining employees received. She didn't realize that we were informed in August 2024 that we would receive the salary increases granted to the bargaining unit.

Decision

- Give NESS-eligible employees salary increases in line with the bargaining unit employees through end of FY26 (June 30, 2026). After that, she will reevaluate.
- Salary increases include 2.5% merit, 1% longevity (with USM for at least 5 years) and \$700 flat increase on 1/1/2026. (COLA of 1% was given to all staff.) Staff at the top of their range will receive a flat increase. HRSTM will assess all NESS employee salaries to make this determination. Each of us will receive letters outlining where our salaries fall on the USM salary guideline and what our anticipated increases will be.

Lynne Adams

- The university started negotiations with AFSCME in Fall 2022. It was the first cross-collaboration with all USM campuses that have AFSCME staff.
- Confidential employees cannot participate in this type of negotiation, but benefit from the result.
- Raises will be retroactive to July 1, 2025. We should expect to see the retro pay on our September 26, 2025 paycheck.

Dr. Sheares Ashby

- Acknowledges that we're having to wait a long time for the retro pay.
- Has asked HRSTM to review all position descriptions (PDs) for NESS-eligible employees over the next academic year to ensure that each staff member is in the correct job classification. Results of that review will help inform the compensation structure next

fiscal year. HR will work with staff members and their supervisors to understand what each position entails (if the staff member works nights and weekends, etc).

Dr. Sheares Ashby

- Thanks to NESS leadership for bringing this issue to her attention. She also acknowledges support from Lynne and Kacey.
- She asks that, in the future, if something feels “off” about a decision she’s made, please assume good intentions and ask about it.

Helena

- Thanks to Dr. Sheares Ashby for giving NESS-eligible staff raises consistent with bargaining unit staff.
- It seems that sometimes the classification of Confidential has been assigned inappropriately, so we’re glad position descriptions are going to be reviewed.
- NESS leadership will meet with HR quarterly, which will help keep lines of communication open.

Later discussion among NESS members

- Concern that administration might separate our group from the bargaining unit for future pay increases.
- Although the President asked us to question decisions that feel “off”, NESS leadership did approach Dan Petree, Acting VP of Administration and Finance, and Lynne Adams about the decision to exclude us from the pay increases.

Report from previous Committee meetings

- CUSS (Cathy Fu): There was some discussion among reps. from different campuses about the lack of summer dining options, also other campuses who have switched to Workday have many complaints about how difficult processes have become.

Open Committee Positions within NESS. Please let Helena know if you can serve here.

- Athletic Policy Committee
- Alternative CUSS rep. (Cathy Fu is primary)
- Pre School Committee
- Climate action Steering committee
- Transportation Working Group
- Inclusion Council Committee

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for **September 10, 2025** at 11:30 am.

--- Cathy Fu, NESS Secretary