



# COUNCIL OF UNIVERSITY SYSTEM STAFF

CUSS Summer 2026

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CUSS Newsletter

August 2026

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## In This Issue



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*Chair's Update*

*Feature*

*Board of Regents 2026 Staff Awards*

## Letter from CUSS Chair Roy Prouty

### **Council of University System Staff (CUSS)**

The Council of University System Staff (CUSS) recently held our final meeting of the 2026 academic year at Bowie State University. We were warmly welcomed by the Bowie State community and President Dr. Aminta Breaux, who highlighted the campus's impressive growth in nursing, research, and HBCU national rankings, while also acknowledging the difficult budgetary landscape facing institutions across the USM.

### **New Leadership for the Coming Year**

We are pleased to announce our executive board for the upcoming year:

- Chair: Roy Prouty (UMBC)
- Vice Chair: Meredith Carpenter (UMCP)
- Secretary: Kelly Cowger (SU)

As chair, I am excited to continue the rewarding work of ensuring communication channels are open and that the 13,000 of us non-bargained staff across the system are able to work safely, securely, and under clear policies all while making the best use of our benefits.

### **Key Priorities & Upcoming Work**

The council is focused on several major initiatives aimed at supporting staff across all campuses:

- **Tuition Remission:** We have chartered a new ad hoc committee to investigate the inter-institutional transfer of funds and to ensure that staff have a voice in shared governance when changes are made to tuition remission eligibility.
- **Performance Management:** We heard your concerns regarding inconsistent performance review requirements across the system. We are launching a fact-finding effort to understand how different campuses handle goals, competencies, and evaluation standards to advocate for a more equitable process.

- **Staff Compensation & Contracting:** We are closely monitoring the system-wide compensation study (the Segal report) and looking into how contracted services impact current staff roles.
- **Telework:** We are continuing to track how telework policies are applied at the department and divisional levels to keep the community informed.

Thank you for your continued dedication to our university communities.



Roy Prouty

Council of University System Staff

## Feature - Board of Regents Awards Winners

Each year, the Council of University System Staff coordinates the Board of Regents Staff Awards nomination process across all USM institutions and regional centers. A significant milestone in 2025–2026 was the introduction of separate award categories for exempt and non-exempt staff, ensuring broader recognition of employee achievements. As the highest honor bestowed upon staff within the University System of Maryland, the Board of Regents Staff Awards recognized nine exceptional employees whose contributions have had a meaningful impact on their campuses and communities. Award recipients are celebrated during the annual Board of Regents Awards ceremony and receive a \$2,000 prize sponsored by USM institutions and the USM Foundation.

## Exempt Staff Award Recipients



### **Award - Exceptional Contribution to the University**

*The Exceptional Contribution to the University Award recognizes individuals whose innovation, leadership, and dedication have made a lasting impact on their department and the University community, advancing the University's mission and success.*

### **Award Recipient - William Cooper - University of Maryland, Baltimore**

*33 years in the USM. 26 years at UMB. 15 years as Sr. Associate Dean for Admin & Finance and Chief Operating Officer*

William J. Cooper, the Senior Associate Dean for Administration and Finance and Chief Operating Officer at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy (UMSOP), is nominated for the 2026 Board of Regents Staff Award for Exceptional Contribution to the University and/or Unit. Throughout his 26 years at UMB and 33 years in the USM, he has made extraordinary contributions to the School's growth and success in areas including Budget and Finance, HR, Facilities, and IT. His vision has transformed the physical environment of the School, where he

played a leading role in planning and constructing over \$700 million in USM facilities, such as the Pharmacy Hall Addition, Pharmacy Learning Center, and Health Sciences Facilities II and III. Notably, he oversaw the rapid establishment of the School's satellite campus at the Universities at Shady Grove in under a year and championed the creation of the Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) facility in Pharmacy Hall, which produces medications for clinical trials and led to the FDA-funded CERSI partnership with UMCP. He has also directed over 75,000 square feet of internal renovations, modernizing various spaces.

Cooper's financial stewardship has been exceptional, guiding the School through challenging budget cycles with composure. He proposed and implemented Mission-Based Budgeting to align resources with mission-critical priorities, developed a five-year financial model for long-term planning, and secured over \$5 million in new state funding, including

\$2 million for the Maryland and National Capital Poison Centers. He developed the business model for the expansion of the PharmD program to the Universities at Shady Grove, and later facilitated business plans for revenue-generating MS and PhD programs. Beyond his unit, he has served on numerous campus committees, including co-chairing the HR COVID Recovery Task Force and the Campus Emergency Management Team. He also established the Faculty Effort Committee, which created processes for managing workload, assessing productivity, and implementing a recurring Faculty Salary Equity Review. As a campus-wide mentor, he has guided and mentored numerous leaders, including three Deans and multiple Associate Deans and Department Chairs, ensuring continuity during leadership transitions.



**Award - Outstanding Service to Students**

*The Outstanding Service to Students Award recognizes a staff member whose dedication, mentorship, and advocacy have made a lasting impact on student success, growth, and achievement throughout their University System of Maryland career.*

**Award Recipient - Tammie King-Kelly - Towson University**

*12 years at TU. 5 years as Director of Student Success Programs in Student Affairs*

Tammie King-Kelly, Director of Student Success Programs (SSP) in the Division of Student Affairs at Towson University (TU), is nominated for the 2026 Board of Regents Staff Award for Outstanding Service to Students in an Academic or Residential Environment. Throughout her 12 years at TU, she has dedicated her career to supporting and educating students, whom she refers to as "emerging adults". In her role, she provides leadership for SSP, overseeing key programs and initiatives focused on student retention and persistence. She successfully grew the long-standing SAGE (Students Achieve Goals through Education) peer mentoring program, increasing the number of mentors to more than 80 and mentees to more than 400. She also oversaw the growth of a spinoff SAGE Living Learning Community, where approximately 40 mentees and 4 mentors opt to live together on campus. Tammie has been instrumental in expanding resources for historically excluded students. She supported the growth of outreach groups, including Gen One (for

first-generation students), Man 2 Man (for male students of color), and H.E.R. (for female students of color). Her efforts led to TU joining the First Scholars Network and being recognized as a First-Forward Institution for the Gen One Program, with her work earning official Gen One Day Proclamations from the State of Maryland and Baltimore County.

Tammie is known for her hands-on, student-centered approach, acting as a director, mentor, motivator, and constant source of encouragement. She is highly involved, working one-on-one with students after hours and even checking in on students in crisis from the hospital. She has a particular gift for working with students "on the margins," including those who are Pell-eligible, from economically depressed areas, or are first in their family to attend college. Tammie regularly cultivates connections between TU alumni and current students through programs like "Real-ish," which brings alumni to serve as career panelists for SAGE students and includes live résumé reviews conducted by campus partners she recruited. She has advised countless student organizations, with those groups receiving multiple Student Leadership Awards. Furthermore, she has demonstrated fiscal stewardship by awarding over \$350,000 in scholarships from various funds and working with the Student Government Association (SGA) to create annual Gen One Scholarships. Her impact is evidenced by TU having 20% higher graduation rates among students of color. Tammie also serves on various campus committees, including the Care Team and Title IX Hearing Boards.



**Award - Extraordinary Public Service to the University or Greater Community**

*The Extraordinary Public Service to the University or Greater Community Award honors individuals whose sustained commitment to community engagement, advocacy, and partnership has created a lasting impact on the University and the communities it serves.*

**Award Recipient - Jabari Walker - Bowie State University**

*16 years in the USM. 12 years at BSU. 4 years as Coordinator of Sustainability and Energy in Facilities Management*

Jabari S. Walker, the Sustainability and Energy Coordinator at Bowie State University (BSU), is nominated for the 2026 Board of Regents Staff Award for Extraordinary Public Service for the University or Greater Community in recognition of his transformative work in sustainability, climate action, and community engagement over his 12 years at the institution. He has spearheaded numerous projects that have secured over \$1.75 million in external grant funding from organizations like the Maryland Energy Administration and the U.S. Department of Energy. Among his infrastructure achievements, he served as the project manager for initiatives that resulted in the world's first solar-operated bus shelter (2019) and led the restoration of Peace Park, transforming it into a site for reflection and exemplary stormwater management. He was also central to securing the \$22 million Resilient Microgrid project, which will provide reliable

energy for critical campus systems and support nearby vulnerable communities during extreme weather. Jabari has also authored BSU's Climate Action Plan 2020 and is currently leading the development of a Decarbonization and Clean Energy Master Plan. His efforts have positioned BSU as a leading Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in climate action and earned the university the designation of a Tree Campus Designated University by the Arbor Foundation for three consecutive years (2022-2024).

Mr. Walker's impact extends far beyond campus operations through his focus on student and community development. He founded the BSU Green Ambassadors program, now an official student organization, which provides hands-on learning and leads community service events, and whose efforts led to a \$5,000 contribution from Dash-In. He created the BSU Climate Career Fair, which grew into the Central Maryland HBCU Climate Career Expo, linking hundreds of students and alumni with more than 30 partners for green career opportunities. Jabari also serves externally as Co-Chair of the Education, Communications, and Outreach Workgroup of the Maryland Commission on Climate Change and as an External Advisory Board Member for Maryland Sea Grant, amplifying BSU's leadership in state and national policy.

Within BSU, he serves as Vice Chair of the Staff Council and created the Staff Employees of the Month program. His commitment to service is further demonstrated by his partnership with Youth Opportunities (YO!) Baltimore, which brought young adults from Baltimore City to campus to learn about green careers, and his collaborations with the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay on various clean-up and trail restoration projects.



### **Award - Effectiveness and Efficiency**

*The Effectiveness and Efficiency Award recognizes staff members whose innovation and resourcefulness improve operations, maximize resources, and advance the University's commitment to excellence and continuous improvement.*

### **Award Recipient - Michael Franklin - Towson University**

*20 years at TU. 6 years as Sr. Technical Operations Manager in Event and Conference Services*

Michael Franklin, the Senior Technical Operations Manager for Event and Conference Services at Towson University, is nominated for the 2026 USM Board of Regents Staff Award in the Effectiveness and Efficiency category in recognition of his exceptional ability to improve systems, processes, and outcomes over his 20 years at the institution. He successfully rebuilt the student and part-time staff infrastructure to pre-pandemic levels, restoring over 30 positions and strengthening training standards, which cut onboarding time by nearly half and reduced associated labor costs by over \$5,000 annually. He improved internal documentation and communication by migrating Technical Operations materials to the centralized, university-licensed SharePoint platform, moving away from Google Drive. This transition yielded cost savings of over

\$3,600 annually and streamlined workflows by reducing time spent searching for files and duplicating content. Michael also created a new Technical Repair and Training Specialist position, which has facilitated over 100 in-house repairs annually, saving thousands of dollars in vendor fees and reducing equipment downtime. He also led the implementation of SubItUp, a staff scheduling and management platform, in partnership with Campus Recreation Services, which saves an estimated 10-15 staff hours each week.

Franklin's technical expertise has led to significant financial and sustainability gains, particularly through his collaborative work with the Athletics department. He guided major upgrades to video production capabilities for in-house and broadcast use, reducing external vendor expenses by over 40% for sports like volleyball, football, and basketball. This innovation also reduced annual external vendor costs by more than \$13,000 for the in-house video capabilities at Unitas Stadium and SECU Arena. Additionally, he and his team upgraded lighting fixtures and programming, reducing billed costs to campus groups by nearly 20% while improving energy efficiency. His focus on cross-training student technicians across multiple roles, such as sound, video, and lighting, has created a versatile workforce, reducing the need for additional specialists or overtime and strengthening the efficiency of operations during large-scale events like commencements. Michael also serves as an adjunct professor, teaching courses like "Live Sound Reinforcement," and oversees internships, lending his expertise to the next generation of students.



**Award - Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging**

*The Effectiveness and Efficiency Award recognizes staff members whose innovation and resourcefulness improve operations, maximize resources, and advance the University's commitment to excellence and continuous improvement.*

**Award Recipient - Nicole Palmore - University of Maryland, Baltimore**

*13 years at UMB. 3 years as Executive Director of Employee and Organizational Success in UMB Admin & Finance*

Nicole Palmore, Executive Director of Employee and Organizational Success in the Administration and Finance department at the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB), is nominated for the 2025-2026 USM Board of Regents Staff Award in the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging category in recognition of her significant cultural change efforts over her three years in the position. She has established the Office of Employee and Organizational Success, whose purpose is to cultivate spaces where all employees feel valued, respected, and empowered to succeed. Her work includes creating eight A&F Communities, which are employee-initiated groups providing safe spaces and resources for marginalized employee groups like employees of color, the LGBTQIA+ community, and those with disabilities, as well as groups for Mature Professionals, Young Professionals, and Caregivers of All Kinds. She also created the WISER Together Inclusion Program to strengthen shared cultures by integrating Guiding Principles into daily work through inclusive practices and collaboration, with events focusing on topics like mental health and multigenerational differences. This program also led to the planned opening of a WISER Together lounge in Fall 2025 to support non-desk-based employees with a private space for work-related needs like utilizing computers or private phone booths.

In support of equity and justice, Nicole Palmore revised candidate search committee processes with interview panel training to mitigate bias, resulting in over 100 employees participating to date. She also facilitated a partnership with the Goodwill Excel Center High School Diploma Program, which allows A&F employees to attend a tuition-free program during normal business hours to earn their high school diploma. This initiative provides support such as job training and transportation assistance, and the first graduate was celebrated in September 2025. Other key initiatives include instituting quarterly Meet and Greet events for new A&F employees to meet with senior leadership and creating Camp Hippodrome, a free, one-day camp for children of A&F employees. Her efforts have led to increased employee engagement and satisfaction within A&F, and she is recognized as a trusted resource across the UMB campus.

## Non-Exempt Staff Award Recipients



### **Award - Excellence in Performance**

*The Excellence in Performance Award recognizes individuals whose exceptional professionalism, dedication, and consistently outstanding performance contribute significantly to the success of their team, department, and organization.*

### **Award Recipient - Nicole Talbott Holton - Salisbury University**

*6 years at SU. 1 year as Academic Program Specialist in the Salisbury University Writing Center*

Nancy Talbott Holton, Academic Program Specialist (APS) in the University Writing Center (UWC) at Salisbury University (SU), is nominated for the 2026 Board of Regents Staff Award in the category of Excellence in Performance in recognition of her exceptional work over her one year in the role and her six years at SU. As APS, she is vital in managing almost 40 schedules for

tutoring and reception staff and handling all campus requests for workshops, events, and classroom visits. She has made transformative contributions to the UWC, which serves an average of 25–27% of all SU students, exceeding the national average for writing centers (10–25%). A major accomplishment was her instrumental role in launching the UWC's First Year Seminar (FYS) workshop programming, a new requirement for all first-time students as part of the university's curriculum change. She contributed content and format to the four FYS workshops based on her MA coursework and experience as a writing center consultant, ensuring they align with learning objectives and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. In the first year of the FYS program, she scheduled all 39 FYS workshop requests, coordinated with consultants, and handled advertising and communication with faculty. This new programming contributed to a usage jump in UWC services to over 38%.

Beyond administrative and coordination duties, Nancy's work is essential to the UWC's largest-ever assessment project, which tracks cohorts of first-year students to understand how UWC interactions, along with academic and demographic information, impact university-wide retention efforts. She maintains, tracks, and prepares this massive dataset, which includes pre- and post-assessment metrics for thousands of participants and involves merging files from EAB Navigate. This work requires her to utilize advanced Microsoft Excel features and mid-level statistical knowledge, and to consult with colleagues across various departments. In recognition of her data analysis expertise, she was invited to and participated in the two-week intensive Dartmouth Summer Seminar for Writing Research in June 2024, an event she also helped seamlessly host, and is assisting with ongoing data analysis for an Elkins Fellowship project. Nancy's dedication to detail, willingness to seek out opportunities, and commitment to student success—demonstrated as a two-time alumna and a former UWC consultant—make her a model of excellence for staff and students.



### **Award - Making a Difference to the Campus**

*The Making a Difference to the Campus Award recognizes staff members whose leadership, service, and collaboration create a positive and lasting impact on the broader campus community.*

### **Award Recipient - Donnell VanSkiver - Frostburg State University**

*5 years at FSU. All 5 as Executive Administrative Assistant in the President's Office*

Donnell VanSkiver, Executive Administrative Assistant III in the President's Office at Frostburg State University (FSU), is nominated for the 2026 Board of Regents Staff Award in the category of Making a Difference to the Campus for her work in creating the Administrative Development and Professional Training Program (ADAPT). Recognizing a gap in structured professional development for administrative support staff, Donnell reached out to the Office of Human Resources (OHR) with the idea for ADAPT in late 2021. She then worked with OHR staff to plan the structure, develop modules, build an application process, create training sessions, and advertise the new program. ADAPT provides comprehensive training in communication, leadership, project management, and university operations, and creates a network for

employees across different offices to learn, exchange best practices, and form lasting networks. The program accepted its first cohort in 2023, and by December 2025, it will have graduated its third cohort for a total of 18 graduates, including participants from the University System of Maryland at Hagerstown (USMH). After the first cohort, a sizeable donation was made in Donnell's honor after she established the ADAPTable Fund to support future cohorts.

The ADAPT program has also expanded its impact beyond FSU's campus. In 2024, Donnell created the annual ADAPT Community Conference Series, a full-day educational experience addressing trending topics and challenges relevant to administrative support professionals throughout Western Maryland. This conference provides training and networking

opportunities to individuals and companies in the region. Internally, ADAPT has led to measurable improvements in efficiency, employee engagement, and morale, and has broken down silos between administrative units. Donnell's quiet mentorship and leadership have inspired participants, with one graduate stating that the program provided the confidence to pursue a promotion and receive the Impact Leader Award. Donnell's commitment to the program's sustainability is evident in her recruitment of past graduates to serve on the ADAPT steering committee, ensuring that participants can give back and continue to nurture the relationships they created. In August 2023, Donnell won the 2nd Annual Washington, D.C. Admin Leadership Award for her work.



### **Award - Outstanding Role Model**

*The Outstanding Role Model Award honors individuals who lead by example through professionalism, integrity, mentorship, and a commitment to helping others succeed.*

### **Award Recipient - Sheryl Grey - University of Maryland, College Park**

*41 years at UMCP. 17 years as Business Services Specialist in the Animal and Avian Sciences in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources*

Sheryl Grey, Business Services Specialist in the Department of Animal and Avian Sciences (ANSC) at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP), is nominated for the 2026 Board of Regents Staff Award in the category of Outstanding Role Model, recognizing her 41 years of service to

the USM and 17 years in her current position. She is deeply respected by faculty, staff, and students due to her exemplary professionalism, integrity, and unwavering commitment to service.

Sheryl manages an extensive portfolio of complex and time-sensitive responsibilities, including bi-weekly payroll, benefits administration, employment coordination, and visa processing for visiting scholars. She executes these duties with precision, reliability, thoroughness, and care, consistently meeting challenges and ensuring compliance with federal, state, and university regulations. Her ability to adapt to evolving university systems and policies over decades without compromising accuracy sets a high standard for accountability and makes her a model for resilience and professionalism.

Beyond her core duties, Sheryl's impact lies in her role as a trusted resource and mentor to the department and the broader university community. She formally and informally trains junior staff, guides faculty through HR and payroll systems, and provides practical support to graduate assistants and international scholars navigating new policies. She is proactive in staying informed about policy changes, particularly in the complex area of visa processing, which ensures the department remains compliant. For students, she is often the first point of contact for employment or benefits processes, and her patient, maternal, and supportive demeanor makes challenging administrative processes manageable. Through her leadership-by-example, Sheryl has helped shape a departmental culture defined by responsibility, respect, and service, which enhances the entire department's success and contributes to morale and cohesion.

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