

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN INDIANA

Staff Council Annual End-of-Year Report

Fiscal Year 2025–2026 | Submitted by Abby Yates, Staff Council Chair

1. Executive Summary

The 2025–2026 fiscal year was marked by high institutional engagement, critical policy advocacy, and restructuring for the University of Southern Indiana (USI) Staff Council. Under the leadership of Chair Abby Yates, the council actively represented the interests of support staff across campus, fostering direct open communication with senior leadership, addressing vital grievance areas, and successfully executing campus wide initiatives.

Most notably, the Council utilized targeted survey data collected from campus employees to successfully lobby Human Resources for a major update to the University Employee Handbook, explicitly protecting and incorporating support staff meal breaks. In addition, the Council successfully modified its operational bylaws to adapt to shifting committee workloads, established new structural avenues for financial and administrative governance, and organized successful community support events including the Giving Tree initiative and the annual Support Staff Recognition Award Luncheon.

2. Governance & Leadership Council

The Staff Council operated with a committed group of representatives throughout the year, collaborating across specialized committees to execute administrative goals.

Council Roster & Attendance Summary

Representative	Affiliation / Role Baseline	Status / Notes
Abby Yates	Staff Council Chair / Executive Committee	Active (Full Term)
Zoe Meuth	Council Representative / Key Minutes Submitter	Active (Full Term)
Raffaella (Ella) Avolio-Alschbach	Vice Chair, Economic Benefits & Communications	Active (Full Term)
Avanly Meuth	Council Representative	Active (Full Term)
Sarah Hellenberg	Council Representative	Active (Full Term)
Ed Krohn	Chair, Economic Benefits & Communications	Active (Full Term)
Constance Hermann	Associate Director of HR / Council Advisor	Appointed April 2026 by President Bridges
Alyson Roblero	Secretary, Economic Benefits & Communications	Resigned May 2026
Danny Kloenhamer	Council Representative	Resigned October 2025
Krista Glenn	Council Representative	Resigned November 2025
Destiny Powell	Council Representative	Removed November 2025 (Non-attendance)

Administrative Transitions & Advisors

- **Executive Leadership:** In February 2026, the Council opened executive nominations for the upcoming cycle's Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary roles to ensure continuous operational governance.
- **Human Resources Advisory Integration:** In April 2026, President Steven Bridges officially appointed Constance Hermann, Associate Director of Human Resources, to serve as the official Staff Council Advisor and Financial Manager, formalizing fiscal alignment and institutional communications between the Council and HR.

3. Key Policy Achievements & Employee Advocacy

Handbook Amendment on Support Staff Meal Breaks

The definitive advocacy achievement of the fiscal year was the official update to the USI Employee Handbook regarding rest periods. In Late 2025, the Council identified that *Section D.3: Rest Periods (Breaks)* omitted explicit language concerning meal breaks for hourly support staff, with mentions existing only on a provisional alternate work arrangement page.

Impact Metric: Using extensive data gathered from the Faculty and Staff Survey, the Council systematically demonstrated staff demand and successfully negotiated with HR and the University Legal Team. On **April 4, 2026**, Human Resources distributed a campus-wide notification confirming that Section D.3 was updated to formally guarantee meal breaks for all support staff.

Institutional Transparency & Leadership Dialogues

During the November 19, 2025 session, the Council hosted President Steven Bridges and Mr. Zachary LaGrange (VP for Government Affairs and General Counsel) to address several severe grievances:

- **Website Language & Realignments:** Representatives challenged leadership regarding the unannounced removal of diversity, equity, and inclusion text from the university website, and raised staff concerns regarding the structural absorption of the Multicultural Center into the Student Life Office.
- **Compensation & Revenue Realities:** The Council brought forth deep employee frustrations regarding low wages, specifically citing survey findings that staff with five or more years of tenure felt less respected. President Bridges noted that hourly wage growth remains strongly tied to student enrollment, retention, and university-generated revenue, naming Sarah Will as the primary operational point of contact for ongoing discussions.

Additional Grievance Evaluations

- **Extended Winter Recess Request:** Following an anonymous employee request to grant Monday, December 22, 2025 off preceding winter recess, the Chair formally advanced the proposal to the President's office to accommodate holiday travel planning.
- **Work Boot Replacement Policy:** Committee member Ed Krohn initiated an evaluation of the FOP's rule requiring work boot replacement every 18 months, investigating OSHA personal protective equipment baselines to build an institutional case for regular replacements.
- **Campus Parking Grievance:** The Council formally logged and deliberated on a parking grievance requesting dedicated employee-only parking zones on campus.

4. Committee Reports & Strategic Initiatives

Employee Benefits and Communications (EBC) Committee

- **Survey Analysis:** Analysed the comprehensive USI Faculty and Staff Survey data, formatting metrics into visual models to guide annual goals. Popular staff recommendations surfaced included a paid time off (PTO) pool, birthday leaves, and increased fee waiver credit hours.
- **Financial Literacy:** Arranged university wide access to a specialized TIAA financial webinar on March 26, 2026, following strong staff requests for dedicated retirement investment guidance.
- **Budgetary Orientations:** Proposed and a mid-April 2026 University Budget Kickoff session featuring Jeff Sickman to break down university-wide fiscal realities and projections transparently for the campus community.

Employee Relations (ER) Committee

- **The Giving Tree Initiative:** Despite early logistical hurdles, the entire Council rallied to support the Giving Tree project, successfully managing ornament distribution and meeting the December 10, 2025 donation deadline. The committee established collaborations with the USI Foundation to anchor future funding for employee gift cards.
- **Archie's Closet Drives:** Coordinated a successful donation collection drive during the Fall Wellness Fair. The scheduled Spring drive was strategically deferred pending the final readiness of the closet's new physical campus location.
- **Campus Engagement Activations:** Facilitated the annual Fall Pumpkin Decorating Contest with centralized breezeway and digital voting. Managed the campus-wide Student Worker Appreciation Week (March 16–20) by partnering with the Campus Store to distribute 20% discount coupons to student workers.

5. Bylaw Restructuring & Marketing Campaign

- **Giving Tree Ad Hoc Status:** Recognizing the high volume of operational commitment required for the holiday program, the Council voted in January 2026 to officially amend the standing bylaws, spinning off the Giving Tree from the ER Committee into an independent, council-wide Ad Hoc Committee.
- **Eligibility & Election Expansion:** Throughout Spring 2026, the Council drafted structural bylaw amendments broadening the eligibility parameters for staff members serving on the council and extending the annual operational timeframe for holding representative elections.
- **Recruitment & Newsletter Blueprint:** Faced with a smaller baseline roster, the Council split recruiting duties to directly invite new members and consult with supervisors regarding participation accommodations. To boost institutional visibility, a biannual Staff Council Newsletter framework was authorized to transmit progress reports at the start and conclusion of each semester.

6. Summer Planning & Upcoming Calendar

The Council successfully brought its major annual operations to a close in the summer block through the following key events:

- **Support Staff Recognition Award:** Nominations were meticulously processed with full redactions to guarantee blind, bias-free voting via secret ballot. The formal award, which added an honorable mention distinction for the first time, culminated at the annual Recognition Award Luncheon on June 4, 2026, inside Carter Hall.
- **Celebrate the Trails Project:** Accepting an invitation from Barbara Goodwin and Bob Gober, the Council committed to participating in the June "Celebrate the Trails" community event, engaging in guided walks and building letterboxes to enhance the existing campus trail infrastructure.

Next General Session: June 17, 2026 at 1:00pm | Location: UC 2206