

# People and Culture NEWSLETTER



Office of Talent, Culture, and Engagement

FROM THE



## ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS DAY

**O**n April 23, in the Bluebonnet Ballroom, 225 administrative professionals from across the University came together in celebration of Administrative Professionals Day.

Designed to appreciate the critical role administrative professionals play across UTA and beyond, this event recognized administrators' hard work, dedication, and contributions to operational excellence. It was a time to appreciate their efforts and create an energizing experience in their honor.

Vice President of Talent, Culture, and Engagement Jewel Washington attended and shared thoughtful opening remarks that set the tone for the celebration. Her presence and words of appreciation helped affirm the value of the administrative community. Positive energy and joyful interactions continued throughout the event, with raffle games and prizes, food people raved about, and line dancing that fostered cross-functional connection.

This year's creative theme "Masquerade: Wear Your Strengths Like a Beautiful Mask," invited attendees to reflect on their personal and professional strengths and how those often work behind the scenes, much like a mask. The masquerade concept was brought to life through decor, interactive mask-making, and an emphasis on self-celebration.

Feedback from the event was overwhelmingly positive, which is a testament to the hard work, attention to detail, and creativity of TCE's Leadership and Talent Development team, which coordinated the event. Ninety-one percent of attendees said they were likely or very likely to recommend the event to others and 94% said they were very satisfied with the timing of the event.

## Faculty awards

In the spring awards ceremony for faculty and associates, faculty were recognized for excellence in teaching, sustained service contributions to the University, innovative research, and more.



### LETTER FROM THE VP

#### DEAR COLLEAGUES,

It is with great excitement that I welcome you to the inaugural edition of the *People and Culture Newsletter*. As vice president of Talent, Culture, and Engagement, I am particularly enthusiastic about creating this outlet to celebrate the stories, milestones, and accomplishments of our faculty and staff—the very people who tirelessly dedicate themselves to ensuring that UTA is a leader in higher education! This newsletter aligns with one of the central themes of the University's **strategic plan UTA 2030**, People and Culture, and underscores our shared promise of fostering a vibrant, engaged, and supportive environment where every Maverick can thrive.

Each edition will highlight the people who make UTA exceptional and the initiatives that are shaping our workplace culture. From information about engagement opportunities to photos from recent events to previews of new employee resources, this newsletter will provide everything you need to stay connected and inspired.

As we continue to advance the goals of *UTA 2030*, this newsletter will serve as a platform to amplify employee voices and shine a spotlight on our workforce. Thank you for all that you do to make UTA a place of excellence. I look forward to growing this community with you.

Warm regards,

*Jewel Washington*  
Jewel Washington

Vice President of Talent, Culture, and Engagement





#### EMPLOYEE ACCOLADES

## UTA employee to lead System-wide council

Jitenga Knox, administrator at the Center for Innovation in Health Informatics, was named chair of the UT System Employee Advisory Council (EAC). Composed of representatives from each UT System institution, the EAC gives presentations and makes recommendations to the UT Board of Regents and UT System leadership regarding issues of importance to System employees.

At the final meeting of the fiscal year, EAC members came together to exchange ideas,

sharpen strategies, and finalize the annual report to the Board of Regents—an important milestone that reflects the collective voice of employees across the system.

In her role with EAC, Knox is committed to bringing the best employee experience to each of her colleagues. "I'm honored to have been named chair and look forward to continuing our mission of advocacy and engagement on behalf of UT System employees," Knox said.

#### CAMPUS HAPPENINGS

## Staff Development Conference

In June, 243 staff members engaged in networking activities and learned about work/life balance, time management, how to initiate difficult conversations, and more at the Staff Development Conference. Each year, this professional learning event provides the opportunity for UTA staff to connect and collaborate with colleagues from other departments, while exploring innovative practices, sharing institutional knowledge, and strengthening skills that enhance operational excellence.

Participants walked away with tools to communicate clearly in tricky situations, set manageable career goals, build support networks, and manage stress—all tied to this year's theme, "Developing a Better Work You."

The Staff Development Conference Committee, Staff Advisory Council members, and the Executive Committee organized this opportunity for UTA staff to obtain and develop professional experience.

## Milestones all around

This year, as UTA celebrated its 130th anniversary, 280 UTA employees celebrated milestones of their own at two employee service awards banquets in April, held in the Bluebonnet Ballroom of the University Center. Merlynd Nestell, professor of earth and environmental sciences, and Lynn Peterson, professor of computer science and engineering, reached 55 years of service. Eighty employees reached 25-plus years of service, and 200 employees reached 10-plus years of service. All employee attendees received certificates and pins to celebrate their achievement and their dedication to serving the University.

Our TCE staff made sure these milestones were honored properly. Margaret Moore guided the team in preparation and execution of the event. Angelo Carter managed the gifts and supplies while lending on-stage assistance, and Kate Prusock and Gilbert Ara meticulously maintained the years of service lists and ensured every invitation reached its destination.



Employees who reached milestones for their years of service received certificates and pins from Provost Tamara Brown and VP of TCE Jewel Washington.



Lynn Peterson, professor of computer science and engineering, and Merlynd Nestell, professor of earth and environmental sciences, celebrate reaching 55 years of service.



Employees gather for two employee service awards banquets in April.



## RETIREE LUNCHEON

### Former employees, forever Mavericks

Retirees who have dedicated years of their time to the University will always have a home at UTA. Honored with certificates and gifts, 150 retirees gathered for a luncheon in the Bluebonnet Ballroom May 21. They were joined by special guest Arlington Mayor Jim Ross, who updated them on all the latest and highlighted exciting new things on the horizon for Arlington.

Our forever Mavericks were warmly welcomed back to campus by the TCE team, with Margaret Moore leading logistics, Lynn Tanner managing mailings and communications, and Gilbert Ara overseeing retiree information.

## MENTORSHIP

### Employee mentoring program celebrates completion of second cohort

TCE, in collaboration with the Staff Advisory Council, proudly celebrated the conclusion of the 2025 Maverick Momentum Program in June. This six-month initiative, led by the Employee Engagement team, was designed to cultivate a culture of employee mentoring and professional development across our staff community.

The Maverick Momentum Program pairs mentors and mentees from across the University to engage in meaningful dialogue, share knowledge, and participate in enriching development activities. Through workshops, guided sessions, and curated resources, participants developed relationships that fostered personal and professional growth.

"I'm thankful for being chosen to be a part of this initiative, and it has been an incredibly rewarding experience," Mistie Maskil, mentee, said. "My mentor, Jennifer Higgins, has provided me with invaluable guidance and support. I enjoyed the open conversations and the ability to adapt our sessions and time to my specific goal."

At the celebratory reception, participants were honored for their dedication to the program. Their commitment to mentorship and engagement was recognized in a heartfelt ceremony that highlighted the transformative power of collaboration. Adding to the occasion, Nick Viator, assistant vice president for strategic planning, delivered an inspiring keynote

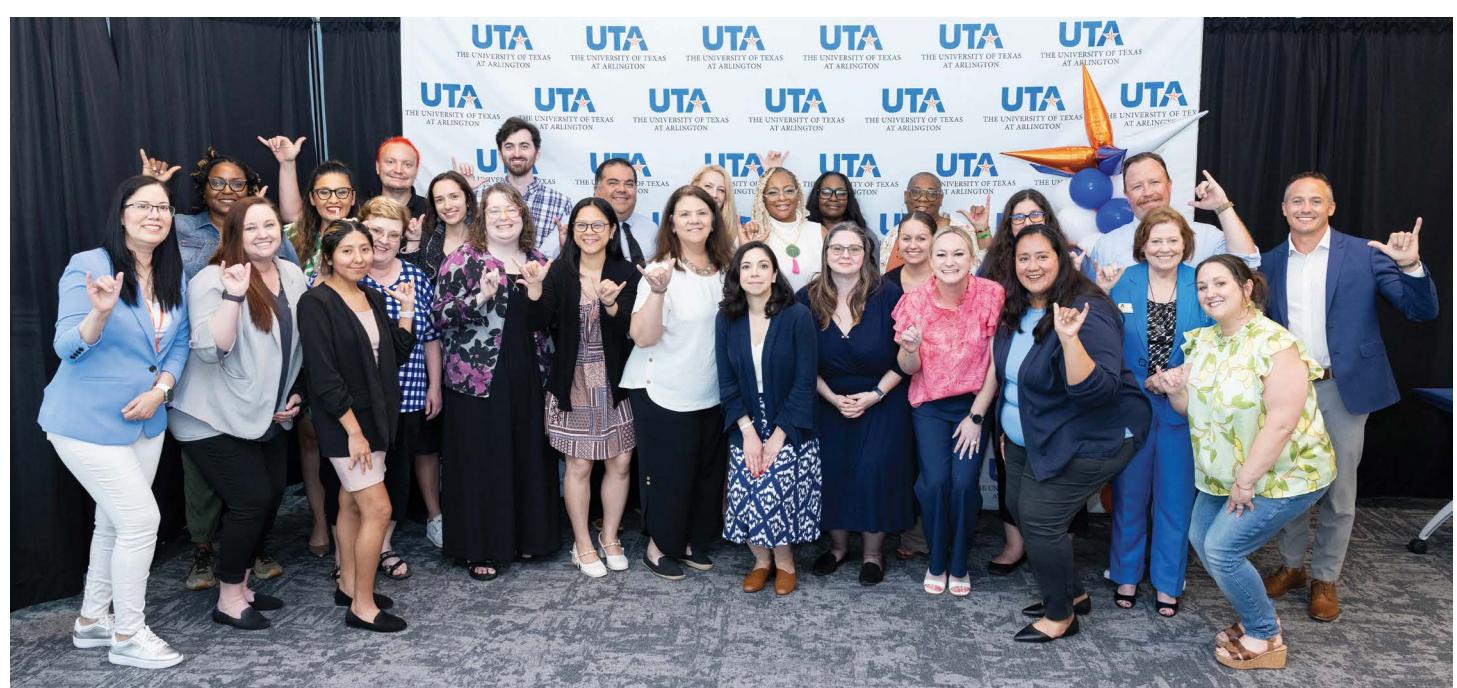
address that emphasized the importance of strategic growth and the role mentorship plays in shaping the future of our institution.

"What I enjoyed most about the mentoring program was gaining a fresh perspective on working at UTA, while serving as a resource and sounding board for someone who wants to give her best every time," Angela Ezell, mentor, said. "In the process of being a part of this program, I have added a wonderful new person to my life."

Congratulations to all mentors and mentees who took part in this year's cohort! Your contributions are helping to build a stronger, more connected Maverick community. If you are interested in UTA's Maverick Momentum employee mentoring program, visit [uta.edu/hr/employee-engagement/employee-mentoring](http://uta.edu/hr/employee-engagement/employee-mentoring) or email us at [engagement@uta.edu](mailto:engagement@uta.edu).



Elizabeth Coen, associate director of prospect development and research, and Rachel Biggs, director of academic communications in the Office of the Provost, receive certificates of recognition.



Program participants connect with other mentors and mentees at the Maverick Momentum Celebration.



Employees network at an on-campus luncheon.

#### SHARED VALUES

## MavUp MVP Program to recognize value-based behaviors

In summer 2024, the Leadership and Talent Development team invited employees to help define what UTA's shared values look like in action. Through voluntary focus groups—primarily with members of the Engagement Council—participants shared real examples of behaviors that reflect our values. More than 220 ideas were collected and analyzed to identify common themes. These insights informed the development of behavior statements for each UTA value, bringing greater clarity to how we live out our values every day.

Soon UTA's shared values and behaviors will launch University-wide, accompanied by employee resources including a team guide, printable posters, an online learning path, an instructor-led course, and an interactive values activity challenge called MavPossible. Our shared values will be embedded into key employee programs—including onboarding, performance evaluations, leadership development, recognition, and engagement initiatives—ensuring our values are reflected not just in words, but in actions.

Coming soon, the MavUp MVP Employee Recognition Program will allow employees to recognize peers, managers, or colleagues who embody the five UTA core values (Collaboration, Engagement, Excellence, Innovation, and Integrity). Part of our strategic plan *UTA 2030*, this cutting-edge internal recognition system will give employees the opportunity to acknowledge praiseworthy achievements and qualities in their peers.

In aligning the recognition to new shared values, employees will gain a clear understanding of what specific behaviors are most relevant to the UTA mission and culture. Participants can create an inspiring recognition card with a personalized, appreciative message describing behaviors they've seen in the honoree who exemplifies our values.

Whether you're recognizing a colleague who excelled at brainstorming an innovative technology project solution (collaboration) or someone who shared both a project's triumphs as well as challenges (Integrity), TCE will be eager to know how your teams are internalizing the shared values behaviors and creating a supportive environment of appreciation. In multiple platforms

throughout the year, employee recognition stories will spotlight the connection between our values and our culture. These real-life examples of our values in action will boost employee motivation and engagement, while reminding us to celebrate everyday praiseworthy actions.

We are excited for every employee to have the opportunity to both give and receive high-fives with the MavUp MVP Employee Recognition program! Everyone participating and modeling our values is essential for creating a thriving workplace culture—together we thrive.



#### RESEARCH & INNOVATION

## Innovation that strengthens Texas communities

From protecting Texans against future floods to advancing drone research and addressing the state's nursing shortage, UTA is driving solutions.

After catastrophic flooding in Central Texas, UTA was chosen by the Texas Water Development Board to lead a statewide effort to modernize rainfall and weather data. UTA's Water Engineering Research Center combines advanced radar with ground sensors for more precise, real-time rainfall measurements. The system will strengthen flood forecasting and water planning across Texas—helping safeguard communities and guiding smarter infrastructure decisions. It will also give UTA students hands-on experience in research that directly benefits the state they call home.

A few miles away at UTARI—UTA's research institute in Fort Worth—UTA opened its \$2.3 million Maverick Autonomous Vehicle Research Center, an outdoor netted drone facility designed to accelerate autonomous technology research. Researchers are advancing technology that enables drones to inspect bridges, power lines, and pipelines, monitor crops and the environment,

and assist in disaster response—hazardous tasks for humans. By hosting this cutting-edge research facility, UTA is helping Fort Worth strengthen its role as the Aviation and Defense Capital of Texas while preparing the next generation of engineers and innovators for emerging careers in advanced air mobility.

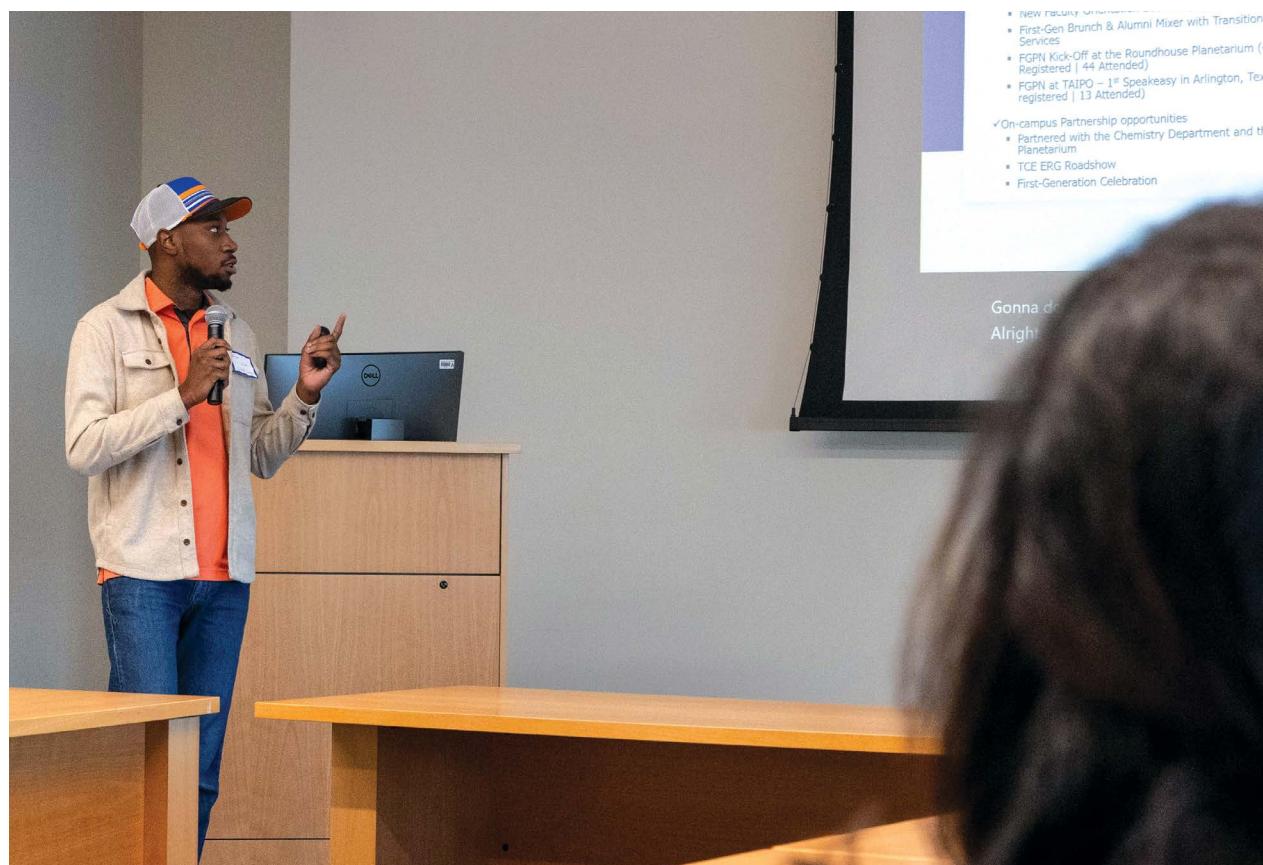
Another example of UTA's innovation making a difference is the College of Nursing and Health Innovation working to address our state's nursing shortage. Enrollment in the college rose 11.5% this fall to more than 13,000 students, supported by a \$5 million grant from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's Nursing Shortage Reduction Program. Through its Center for Rural Health and Nursing and new mobile simulation lab, the college is expanding access to training in rural areas, where hospitals and clinics are facing mounting financial and staffing challenges.

Together, these initiatives show how UTA's innovation reaches far beyond campus—building stronger communities, a safer Texas, and a healthier future for all.

## First-Generation Professionals Network

Leaders across the nation have recognized the critical importance of first-generation success, and over half of UTA's undergraduate population identifies as first-generation students. In summer 2023, UTA joined the National FirstGen Forward Network—a national model supporting institutions in transforming the first-generation student experience, improving academic and co-curricular outcomes, and fostering more inclusive institutional structures. This commitment expanded beyond student support to include first-generation faculty and staff. In response, UTA established the First-Generation Professionals Network (FGPN) in early 2024—an Employee Resource Group (ERG) designed to build community, mentorship, and professional development opportunities for first-generation employees.

In its inaugural year, FGPN established itself as a dynamic and impactful ERG committed to building community, mentorship, and professional development opportunities for first-generation faculty and staff. FGPN emerged as a natural extension of UTA's broader commitment to first-generation student success, creating space for employees to celebrate their identities and support one another. The FGPN leadership team upheld strong accountability through defined roles, bi-weekly planning meetings, and intentional goal setting before every initiative. Events were shaped by participant



Bryan Wilson, secretary of the First-Generation Professionals Network (FGPN), explains how FGPN is fostering on-campus partnerships.

feedback and data gathered from sign-in sheets, registration forms, and post-event reflections, with an end-of-year survey planned to inform future programming.

Over the year, FGPN engaged more than 300 faculty and staff through events, collaborations, and targeted communications. Events such as the First-Gen Brunch & Alumni Mixer, New Faculty Orientation outreach, and a Planetarium kickoff reflected both creativity and cultural relevance. A multi-channel communication strategy—including email campaigns, the UTA Events Calendar, tabling, and social media—amplified visibility and ensured wide reach. Most importantly, FGPN created a space where first-gen professionals felt

seen, supported, and celebrated. This network is more than a group—it is a growing movement to uplift and empower UTA's first-generation professionals while reinforcing a culture of employee engagement across campus.

The Global ERG Network selected FGPN as one of the top three ERGs in the nation, marking the second consecutive year that one of our ERGs was recognized in this way. The Global ERG Network, which has a long history of recognizing employee resource groups across the nation, evaluated GEN IMPACT award honorees based on how they create workplace impacts through their efforts to Innovate, Measure, Progress, Activate, Collaborate, and Transform (IMPACT).

### MEET THE LEADERSHIP TEAM



**Tasha Talton**  
Chair of FGPN  
Director of Transition  
Programs and Services  
and Orientation

Tasha, a proud first-generation college graduate, launched the

First-Generation Initiatives program to support first-gen student success through intentional programs and events. As the first-generation program for students grew, Tasha recognized that building a support system among first-gen faculty and staff was equally as important. Stepping into the chair role for FGPN felt like a natural extension of the work she was already doing.

"Being a part of the inaugural leadership team that helped launch this ERG has been incredibly rewarding. I couldn't have done it without the support of our close-knit leadership team—we've built this together," Tasha said. "What makes it so special is our shared passion for creating first-of-their-kind opportunities for UTA's faculty and staff to connect, grow, and feel seen."



**Nancy Zamora**  
Co-Chair of FGPN  
Program Director of  
HSI Initiatives and Edge  
Center

As the first in her family to graduate from high school

and earn a college degree, Nancy has experienced many "firsts" in her life—challenges and moments in which she wanted guidance that her family members couldn't provide because they had never navigated those experiences. She joined the FGPN leadership team based on her desire to offer other first-gen professionals the support they need to continue breaking barriers and building confidence—both in the workplace and beyond.

Nancy said, "Often, we get so caught up in our day-to-day responsibilities that we forget there are others across campus with similar experiences—people we can connect with and support. Being part of this network has reminded me of the power of community and shared identity."



**Bryan Wilson**  
Secretary of FGPN  
Accessibility Specialist

Bryan, a first-generation professional from Chicago, saw joining the FGPN leadership team as an opportunity to serve as a resource for other first-

generation professionals, while gaining experience in planning and executing events for large audiences. He has helped cultivate awareness for the growing group by leading presentations on the ERG's behalf.

"As the youngest professional on the inaugural leadership team, I enjoy helping other new professionals create positive first experiences in the workplace," Bryan said.



**Robin Macaluso**  
Faculty Representative  
of FGPN  
Associate Professor of  
Chemistry

Robin, a proud first-gen PhD graduate, is grateful to FGPN because it has

helped her meet other amazing staff across campus and learn how they make UTA special. Seeing others on the leadership team in action has given her a greater understanding of effective leadership styles. One of her focus areas in FGPN has been recruiting first-generation faculty into the network and introducing an avenue for them to connect with others in the UTA community.

Robin said, "First-gen faculty are important to the UTA campus. Many students here are first-gen, and I believe that first-gen faculty are in a unique position to inspire and support students and colleagues. We need to share our stories!"



Attendees pose for a group photo at an Extension and Extended Campus event.

## TAKING ACTION

# Plans created based on the People and Culture Survey results

## Action Plan for UTA's Extension and Extended Campus (EEC)

**Focus Area:** Fostering a culture of innovation, collaboration, and professional growth in response to the Gallup People & Culture Survey.

### Action Plan Highlights

Vice President of EEC Teresea Madden and her leadership team are actively addressing opportunities identified in the Gallup People & Culture Survey by reinforcing a culture of creativity, support, and professional development.

#### Here's how EEC is turning insights into action:

**Annual EEC Staff Conference**, which strengthens internal collaboration and showcases innovative programs.

**Monthly "Lunch & Learn" Series** to promote innovation and information, inviting guest speakers to bring fresh perspectives, and skill-building

opportunities for the EEC team. This initiative has enhanced professional development, cross-team networking, and improved communication, along with providing employees the opportunity to put into practice UTA's shared values of collaboration, engagement, excellence, innovation, and integrity.

**DISC Training for All Staff** fosters self-awareness and team synergy through behavioral insights.

**New Employees Initiative** where leaders take new hires to lunch to build rapport and create a welcoming environment, strengthening connections between leadership and new staff.

**Leadership Check-Ins** where leaders visit employees at their workspace to offer support and celebrate wins. These check-ins boost morale and ensure leadership presence that doesn't disrupt work.

### Shoutout to Engaged EEC Champions

**These team members are going above and beyond to bring the action plan to life:**

**Jennifer Bell**, Coordinator III, Special Program, Enterprise Development – coordinates monthly professional development lunches

**Darcy Brignac**, Associate Director, Enterprise Development – leads training topics and staff conference planning

**Staci Moore**, Assistant Director of Conferences and Events, Enterprise Development – organized DISC training and supported the February 2024 conference

**Dawn Hinton**, Director, Enterprise Development – key contributor to the February 2024 conference

**Bob Braun**, Director of Safety & Health, Enterprise Development – integrates Gallup action plan updates into weekly staff meetings



# Action plan for the College of Business

College of Business Dean Harry Dombroski has launched a permanent College of Business Engagement Council to enhance faculty and staff engagement. This council uses data-driven insights to inform strategies, foster collaboration, and strengthen the overall workplace environment.

### Action Plan Highlights

The College of Business Engagement Council coordinates a comprehensive assessment of the college's organizational climate. Through a targeted survey and structured listening sessions, employees can voice concerns, share ideas, and participate in decision-making in a respectful and collaborative environment. This initiative upholds principles of transparency and professionalism while celebrating achievements and fostering institutional pride, ensuring that "upfront honesty" is expressed with civility and mutual respect.

The most impactful elements of the action plan were the strategic selection of key individuals to lead and contribute to the project.

### Shoutout

**Anna-Lisa Leefers** was appointed as project leader to guide the initiative with experience and vision.

**Lars Johnson** demonstrated exceptional analytical skills, providing in-depth research insights that enriched discussions and decision-making.

**Nichole Santee** brought a fresh perspective, offering thoughtful approvals with enthusiasm and a positive energy that inspired forward-thinking ideas.

**Jen Hill** played a vital role in shaping achievable plans and goals, ensuring a balanced and strategic approach.

**Wendy Casper and Myrtle Bell** fostered a supportive and collaborative environment, offering valuable resources, thoughtful insights, and unwavering encouragement.

## MEET A MAV

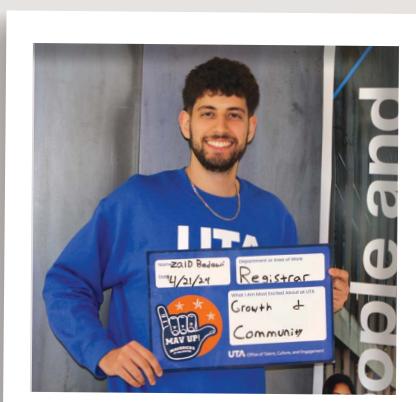
# Excited about working at UTA

New employees attending MavJourney and the New Faculty Orientation Resource Hub were asked the question, **“What are you most excited about at UTA?”**

Here are some of our new employees and their response to the question.



**Dawn, Internal Graduate Admissions**  
“The environment, my co-workers, job growth and opportunities, and the wellness program.”



**Zaid, Office of the Registrar**  
“Growth and community.”



**Elyssa, Admissions**  
“Becoming a part of a community.”



**Detrek, Information Security**  
“Highlight the Information Security program”



**Alice, Theatre Arts and Dance**  
“Making theater with my students.”



**Gabriella, Library**  
“I am most excited about all of the opportunities that UTA offers. Wellness, education, and events.”



**Tatheer, Mathematics**  
“Getting to give back to my alma mater.”



**Steve, Psychology**  
“Working with undergrads and new faculty.”



**Quintin, Athletics**  
“The ability to elevate our Athletics department to tell the UTA story and leverage our home events as a tool for campus and community engagement.”

## Maverick Performance Excellence Award

The Maverick Performance Excellence Award recognizes employees' hard work by granting time off for excellent performance. Launched in fall 2022, this award helps create a positive work environment for employees, increases employee performance and engagement, and improves employee morale. It was designed to highlight the valuable contributions that Mavericks make to their department or college and to the University as a whole. All UTA benefits eligible staff members who have been employed for at least six consecutive months qualify for this recognition.

The very first nomination for the Maverick Performance Excellence Award was made by President Cowley herself, before the website was even live. TCE shared a test link of the site to highlight the program, and she immediately used it to celebrate her team's accomplishments.

### Maverick Performance Excellence Award Criteria

CRITERIA	AWARD TYPE (PAID TIME OFF)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Positive work attitude</li><li>Part of the job duties of employee</li><li>Department/division impact</li><li>Shared values</li></ul>	Four hours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Outside of the scope of the job duties of employees</li><li>Impact outside of the department and/or with institution-wide impact</li><li>Positive work attitude</li><li>Shared values</li><li>Cost savings</li><li>Highly impactful contributions to the department or University resulting in more efficiency, better service cost savings, or successful crisis management</li></ul>	Eight hours



All UTA employees can help their peers get rewarded for their efforts by scanning the QR code.



## Collaboration

Build authentic partnerships to leverage access, skills, talents, and knowledge to achieve desired results.

- Collaborate to create innovative solutions.
- Establish accountable and transparent partnerships.
- Communicate progress effectively.
- Encourage open communication among various teams across campus.



## Engagement

Create a thriving community that demonstrates appreciation, value, and respect for all individuals.

- Engage in constructive feedback and dialogue.
- Promote understanding through active listening.
- Leverage the unique perspectives of others.
- Ensure others are heard, respected, and valued.



## Excellence

Approach all actions with high standards and exemplary service.

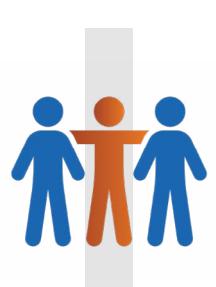
- Commit to continuous learning and growth.
- Prioritize process improvement.
- Deliver exceptional results.
- Recognize and reward outstanding performance.



## Innovation

Consistently strive to think and act in new and creative ways.

- Embrace curiosity and explore new ideas.
- Foster a forward-thinking approach.
- Learn and grow from both successes and mistakes.
- Adapt and refine creative processes.



## Integrity

Demonstrate honesty, transparency, and ethical behavior.

- Be truthful and transparent in your actions.
- Hold yourself and others accountable.
- Take responsibility for your decisions.
- Do the right thing, even when it's difficult.

## PEOPLE & CULTURE

TOGETHER WE THRIVE



Office of Talent,  
Culture, and Engagement

