

**Tennessee State University**  
**Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes**  
**February 26, 2026**

Present: Trustee Artenzia Young-Seigler, Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senator Martene Stanberry, Dr. Muhammad Akbar, Senator Reginald Archer, Senator Ahmed Aziz, Prof. Gwendolyn Battiste, Senator Carlos Beane, Dr. Charles Brown, Dr. Laura Carpenter, Senator Kenneth Chilton, Senator Fadi Fawaz, Senator Cynthia George, Senator Sagnika Ghosh, Senator Sujata Guha, Senator Retta Guy, Senator Mohammad Habibi, Senator Beatrice Harris, Senator Selma Izadi, Senator Kwaku Kankum, Dr. Patricia King, Dr. Margaret Machara, Senator Reynard McMillian, Senator Megan O'Neil, Senator Nsoki Phambu, Senator Sean Posey, Senator Ljerka Rasmussen, Senator Miranda Sanford-Terry, Senator James Scholz, Dr. Joshua Shive, Dr. Kimberly Triplett, and Dr. Tokesha Warner.

**AGENDA:**

Welcome & Call to Order · Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senate Chair

Senator Tiriveedhi addressed the Faculty Senate and shared the meeting agenda. The meeting was called to order at 2:30 PM.

Updates from the Office of Academic Affairs · Dr. Robbie Melton, Provost and Vice-President

The Provost was not available and will provide an update during the next Faculty Senate meeting.

Approval of February 5, 2026 Meeting Minutes · Senator Sujata Guha, Senate Secretary

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the February 5, 2026 meeting, and they were approved.

Faculty Trustee Report · Trustee Artenzia Young-Seigler

Even though each faculty doesn't get back \$2300 for travel, they can still travel if it is approved. If the faculty are grant funded, their travel is not restricted. The NIA is discontinued. The

senators will work with Dr. McMillian to show if it is financially beneficial to the university to reinstate the NIA, even if it is a full year NIA.

Senator Sanford-Terry asked – for those who get Fulbright, NIA is the only option; so how are we decreasing our institutional effectiveness? Trustee Young-Seigler replied that if the financial situation gets better for the institution, the President is not opposed to whatever the State allocates for a pay raise, but not anything additional. Senator Tiriveedhi added that for the next two years, the faculty cannot, realistically, get a raise.

No other institution gives an incentive bonus as TSU gives, so TSU will not give the benefits to fall in line with the other LGIs.

There has been an increase in the parking rate, since TSU was previously charging a rate well below market value. There are other options open for free parking. The parking should be ADA accessible. There is now a parking policy in place, so people who come to campus can now be charged for paid parking.

Tenure and promotion were paused. New metrics need to be developed before tenure and promotion can be unpaused. Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that it will fall under the Faculty Senate Executive Committee. With respect to that matter, Senator George would like to vote for shared governance.

Leah Love of the Ingram Group provided an overview of the legislative matters affecting the University. There are 30 bills that could potentially affect TSU, one of which was to do away with tenure and promotion. However, that bill was pulled and it is not valid anymore.

Another bill was to adopt tenure and disciplinary laws – that bill is House Bill 2194 or Senate Bill 2259 (both are the same). The bill states that each public institution of higher education will adopt a principle of neutrality and campus community to allow free expression with respect. It basically states that tenure cannot be used as a disciplinary act.

There is also another bill which will require the institution to build and maintain a Charlie Kirk memorial. That bill is still on the books to be presented at some point.

The governing board will get 2 more members, appointed by the Speaker of the House and the Speaker of the Senate. Those members of the board do not have to go through the confirmational process. One additional member of the board (Leticia Towns) joined, and there will be another member.

The current Board of Trustees will go through a sunseting process in June 2026. This has to go to the House. If confirmed in the House in March, there will be a Board of Trustees for another 3 years.

The budget was presented on February 18 that passed through the Finance Committee.

The Finance Committee approved the YMCA transaction. The YMCA will have 100 parking spaces downtown.

The Board of Trustees also has an approved debt management policy in place. The university cannot contract to take on new debt without approval from the Board.

The Audit Committee found issues which stemmed from the previous administration. The Board of Trustees approved an internal audit charter.

The Board of Trustees recognizes that, moving forward, we cannot blame anyone but ourselves. TSU now has a new Controller.

There is a restructuring of Financial Aid. April Robinson is the new CFO. Eric Stokes is in Enrollment Management. We should be good stewards of the resources that are brought into the institution.

SACSCOC report is due on March 1<sup>st</sup>, which the Office of Academic Affairs will submit. Student enrollment will have to be increased.

The academic calendar for Fall 2026 has been published and was sent to everyone for feedback, prior to publication.

There are a lot of graduating students in May 2026, and there will be 5 graduation ceremonies in May.

There will be a certain percentage of scholarships given after which there will be a cutoff (at 20%).

Academic programs – Agricultural Sciences has established a new concentration. Engineering has established new concentration in AI. The administrative policy for Health Sciences is trying to change to June. That is also the case with Speech and Hearing Sciences, and M.S. in Occupational Therapy.

### Committee Reports · Senate Standing and Ad Hoc Committee Chairs

Senator Ghosh (Academic Committee) – the committee met on February 24<sup>th</sup>, and it was their first meeting this semester. There were about 12-13 members among which work was divided. The committee is looking at PTR, faculty value and recognition, and chain of command and reporting structure. Information will be shared in the March faculty senate meeting. A question was asked about whether PTR has been implemented into the faculty handbook. Senator O’Neil responded that the faculty handbook cannot be updated until the Office of Academic Affairs updates their policies.

Senator Ghosh (Nomination Committee) – the applications for the position of Faculty Trustee are in progress. Separately, for the nomination of the members of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, an email will be sent to everyone after the updated list of senators from each college is received.

Senator McMillian (Budget Committee) – one of the focal aspects of the committee is for TSU to benefit from alumni donations. The goal is to try to connect everything to the Foundation to bolster the support to the university, due to financial hardships. The concern is that there are no

financial statements or data from the administration. The university does not give this basic income statement to the Board either – so either the statement does not exist, or we don't have a structure to complete them. The CFO stated in a board meeting that Banner does not allow us to do electronic acceptance and clear some things that are paid, so someone must manually do the transactions. However, that does not seem to be true. Senator Sanford-Terry mentioned that Banner does have those capabilities. She was told that we have the premier version of Banner. Banner is working; however, it seems that we don't know how to use it appropriately.

Senator O'Neil (Constitution and Bylaws Committee) – the committee is waiting on the operating manual and for approval from the Office of Academic Affairs.

Senator Sanford-Terry (Curriculum Committee) – the committee is reviewing proposals and moving them forward.

Senator Sanford-Terry (Faculty Grievance and Appeals Committee) – the committee has 2 active grievances under review; one pending confirmation and meeting with the grievant and the other is ready to move forward. The committee will reconvene after Spring Break to move forward with the review process.

Senator Dickson (Faculty Benefits and Welfare Committee) – Senator Sandord-Terry shared the information on behalf of Senator Dickson, since Senator Dickson was in class. The Faculty Benefits and Welfare Committee is looking at family leave and remote work policy.

Senator Phambu (IT Committee) – the committee was unable to meet. However, there will be updates provided by Dr. Armando Mpembele (Office of Technology Services) and Mr. Sterlin Sanders (Interim CIO of IT) next month.

Senator Scholtz (Library Committee) – the committee met this month. The Dean of Libraries gave a presentation about Interlibrary Loan, Science Direct. and document delivery systems.

Senator Posey (Ad Hoc NIA Committee) – since there is no NIA this year, there was nothing to add.

Senator McMillian (Ad Hoc Fair Funding Action Committee) – the administrators are waiting to see if there are any additional finds that will be allocated to the university from the Governor's budget.

Senator Chilton (Professional Development and PTR Committee) – there will be some tenure policy reviews, in general, that could start as soon as possible. The administration wants to move quickly, and it may be tied to the pause on tenure and promotion. There are a lot of old languages in the tenure policy from different colleges. Certain items, such as scholarly production, need to be standardized with numbers and data. Senator McMillian voiced his concern that the change may limit the progress on the tenure review report. Dr. Schmeller was leading the process but may not have time to do that anymore. Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that tenure may be tied to enrollment. That is a sensitive matter, which is why we must look at the language and wait to hear from the administration. Senator Chilton mentioned that he is not aware, in terms of any other university, that tenure is tied to enrollment. Senator George pointed out that tenure is tied to share governance.

## Faculty Trustee Elections and Office Bearers · Senator Sagnika Ghosh, Chair, Senate Nominations Committee

Senator Stanberry emailed all senators on February 5<sup>th</sup> asking for nominations. The nominations were accepted until 5 PM on February 13<sup>th</sup>. Eligible faculty must be currently tenured and have worked for a minimum of 5 years. Four nominations were requested by the deadline, after which Senator Stanberry forwarded the list to HR for approval. The approval was received on February 21<sup>st</sup>, and an email was sent out to candidates noting that they would have 2 weeks to submit their documents on eLearn. Dr. Seay has created eLearn shells for the candidates. The deadline for submission of the candidate's documents is March 11, 11:59 PM. Then all faculty can view the documents, after which the senators will vote. By February 19<sup>th</sup> information will be submitted to the Legal Counsel, HR, President, and Provost. Senator Ghosh asked the faculty senators to encourage their colleagues in the departments to view materials shared by the four candidates and provide feedback.

## Research Funding · Senator Kenneth Chilton

The committee met in December 2025 and again in January 2026. Data has been submitted from RSP to the President's Office. The research report and vote of no confidence need to be resolved. No details have been given to the committee yet from the President's Office. The committee is hoping to have some closure on the report and what the President chooses to do before the next faculty senate meeting.

## ESP Concerns · Senator Miranda Sanford-Terry

This report was presented on behalf of Senator Dickson from the Faculty Benefits Committee. Senator Sanford-Terry gave a summary and asked the senators to look at a presentation that was created and let her know if anything needs to be added. The committees are reviewing ESP, family leave, workload, and remote work policy. The PowerPoint slides went through very detailed policy fragmentation, which Dr. Schmeller has also been looking at it. The overall goal is to support a stronger and clearer alignment across all platforms, ensure transparency, and confirm that the workload aligns with the university's R2 mission. It is very hard to recruit faculty when promotion and tenure are paused. Senator Sanford-Terry requested Dr. Tiriveedhi to share those documents with Dr. Schmeller. The members of the Board of Trustees are not academics, hence the fragmentation and policies.

Senator George stated that if tenure is going to be tied to enrollment and faculty have the responsibility for enrollment, then she would like to know where in the faculty workload policy this would fall. Senator Tiriveedhi echoed this point – if (and when) we get the new tenure guidelines from the administration, the final policy would need to be looked at by everyone. Once we get the guidelines, Senator Tiriveedhi will want a quick turnover from several committee chairs and report to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee. This will be very

sensitive and delicate. All senators will have the responsibility to share with all faculty and get feedback.

Senator Sanford-Terry got feedback about some programs being required to move forward with their required courses even with low enrollment.

#### Other Concerns and Adjournment · Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senate Chair

In previous senate meetings, Senator Williams had mentioned the issue of Clay Hall. All faculty and staff got a note from the President's Office about the demolition of Clay Hall. Specific program modifications are being made.

The next Faculty Senate meeting will be held on March 19, 2026.

Meeting adjourned at 3:48 PM.

Minutes recorded by Senator Sujata Guha, Secretary