

**Tennessee State University**  
**Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes**  
**March 19, 2026**

Present: Trustee Artenzia Young-Seigler, Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senator Martene Stanberry, Senator Reginald Archer, Senator Ahmed Aziz, Senator Carlos Beane, Senator Kenneth Chilton, Senator Poliala Dickson, Senator Fadi Fawaz , Senator Cynthia George, Senator Sagnika Ghosh, Senator Sujata Guha, Senator Retta Guy, Senator Mohammad Habibi, Senator Beatrice Harris, Prof. Courtney Harris, Senator Selma Izadi, Senator Kwaku Kankum, Senator Nsoki Phambu, Senator Sean Posey, Senator Ljerka Rasmussen, Senator Brian Russell, Senator Miranda Sanford-Terry, and Senator Janice Williams.

**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. Erik Schmeller, Interim Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs

Dr. Schmeller gave his first address as Provost. Provost Schmeller has been thinking about the broader aspects to focus on, moving forward. There are financial and upcoming enrollment issues, along with a dire need to get a good-sized freshman class. Provost Schmeller mentioned that by 2027 we can, perhaps, start to see some changes. Student enrollment will be a major driver. Provost Schmeller also mentioned that he will continually notice the efforts that faculty have made related to student retention and progression. His vision is to improve instruction. Senator Chilton has worked with Provost Schmeller previously, and they will introduce the Teacher of the Year award again next year. Provost Schmeller is trying to get a better grasp at all the work that the colleges are doing and the value the faculty are adding to students and the institution. If senators have something to share, they should inform the Department Chair and Dean. The university is still on pause for tenure and promotion. However, all new faculty will go up for tenure and promotion when the process starts again. Provost Schmeller will work with Dr. Seay to ensure that all faculty have eLearn shells. He wants faculty to build their portfolio naturally, instead of rushing to fill in their information. Provost Schmeller is familiar with the faculty's frustration about the state of the university and is looking forward to moving TSU forward. All faculty will receive notification about the VSP (Voluntary Separation Plan) application and are encouraged to attend the informational meetings.

## Approval of February 26, 2026 Meeting Minutes · Senator Sujata Guha, Senate Secretary

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the February 26, 2026 meeting, and they were approved.

## Faculty Trustee Report · Trustee Artenzia Young-Seigler

Trustee Young-Seigler did not have an update since the last meeting but is available to answer questions. The senators should also let her know any concerns to take to the Board and the President.

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

Senator Ghosh (Academic Committee) – the Committee met last week. Senator Tiriveedhi had sent them the redline document, which they discussed. There were a couple of comments from Senator Rasmussen. On the first page of draft is the reason for termination. The new language in the document addresses the immediate financial crisis. The question was whether this constitutes an overreach on the part of this administration. The review period is small and the difference between probationary employment and tenure track status is unclear. The Committee stated that if this policy is being revised, post-tenure review needs to be a part of it, and it needs to be reflected in the Faculty Handbook.

Senator Dickson (Faculty Benefits and Welfare Committee) – the Committee met on March 10<sup>th</sup> and 8 members were present. They did not cover new business, but talked about special meeting with the President, VSP, clarity about paid family leave, and an update to the work policy to be added to the Faculty Handbook.

Senator O’Neil (Constitution and Bylaws Committee) – the Committee is working on the Faculty Handbook. Senator O’Neil was not present, due to a family-related situation.

Senator Sanford-Terry (Faculty Grievance and Appeals Committee/Curriculum Committee) – reports were sent from the Faculty Grievance Committee and Curriculum Committee and comments were received. The Committee is looking into administrative factors along with tenure decisions and requesting clarification. Also, since post-tenure review is being potentially tied to termination, the Committee is seeking clarification about that matter. The Committee is, additionally, looking into shared governance, department criteria, due process, and how the faculty meet the expectations within the current institutional conditions. Both committees requested follow-up, to ensure that the processes are fair and equitable.

Senator Phambu (IT Committee/Research Committee) – the Committee had originally scheduled their meeting on March 20<sup>th</sup>. However, since March 20<sup>th</sup> was a religious observation day, the meeting was canceled. The IT Committee was rescheduled to meet on March 27<sup>th</sup> with Mr. Serlin Sanders, Interim CIO. The Research Committee was scheduled to meet on April 3<sup>rd</sup>. Senator Phambu mentioned that he may invite Provost Schmeller to talk for 5 minutes during the

Research Committee meeting. Senator Phambu also has a concern about remote access, which he will share during the IT meeting.

Senator Chilton (Professional Development Committee/Post-Tenure Review Committee) – the Committee will meet next week about professional development, after which information will be shared with the Faculty Senate. In terms of the post-tenure review, Senator Chilton will work with Senator Sanford-Terry, Chair of the Faculty Grievance and Appeals Committee, and Chair of the Curriculum Committee. Senator Chilton also mentioned that the goal of the administration is to achieve 90-100 faculty voluntary buyouts, which might not be realistic. If we look at the numbers related to the needed budget cuts, another batch of cuts would likely be necessary, depending on enrollments. The “new” language makes it much easier to eliminate faculty for curricular reasons.

Senator Russell (Student Appeals Committee) – the Committee will meet at the end of the semester to review appeals.

Senator Ghosh (Nomination and Appointment Committee) – the Committee met last month regarding the Faculty Trustee election. The deans should send Senator Tiriveedhi information about all senators from their colleges by March 24<sup>th</sup>. Senate Executive Committee elections will be held in April.

Senator Tiriveedhi introduced Senator Stanberry as the Vice-Chair of the Faculty Senate. All administrators (President, Provost, HR, and Legal Office) were informed of the outcome.

Senator Ghosh also mentioned that Senator Tiriveedhi won the election for the Faculty Representative to the Board of Trustees.

In terms of research funding, Senator Chilton mentioned that there is no resolution yet. He will try again, but the President has the final say.

There is a time crunch related to tenure and there is a Board of Trustees meeting in May. The administration is trying to put this as an agenda for their meeting. Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that we need time for at least 3 or 4 iterations, and there is a concern. Can we possibly put pressure on the administration to move this policy from May to September? April 16<sup>th</sup> is the last meeting this semester for our Senate, and the next Senate meeting will be in August. After the end of this semester, we can't ask for an emergency meeting. By default, the new office bearers will take up the responsibility. Let us assume May as the deadline and work hard for it. Senator George asked where the original version came from, who wrote it, and who did the redline. Senator Chilton stated that Provost Schmeller and Mr. Sheehan from TBR were the authors. Senator Chilton also stated that it is impossible to get this done in one month. It deserves at least one or two full faculty forums.

Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that we are trying to balance two things. Faculty are upset that, last year, tenure was on halt. If this is moved to September and the administration wants to halt the applications of tenure and promotion, will it be worth moving it to September? How will the faculty react? An option is that the administration will hold off tenure and promotion until May and start approving them in September. Alternatively, it will be postponed to September, and tenure and promotion will (meanwhile) continue to be on hold. Senator George stated that we should fight for tenure and stand firm. Senator Fawaz mentioned that we don't get any good

support from the Board. Senator Guy agreed. If the administration gets the number of faculty they are looking for to take the VSP, that will change the culture of the faculty community, and the administration will have the opportunity to shape and mold faculty the way they want. Therefore, it is important for the faculty to take a stand now before that happens. The administration needs to understand how that affects the whole university. Without the faculty we do not have a university.

Senator Posey expressed frustration with the pausing of the tenure and promotion policy. Senator Tiriveedhi clarified that the clock is paused for all tenure track faculty. Senator Sanford-Terry mentioned that, in addition to what Senator Posey stated, the lack of university-level travel funds creates equity issues among faculty based on department level funding, which impacts meeting tenure and promotion expectations. Also, if the tenure clock is being paused for tenure-track faculty, it needs to be in writing. The faculty should not be told later that they need to submit their request in writing based on the Faculty Handbook (which just occurred this past year from faculty being hired during COVID-19).

Senator Russell stated that there are no travel funds. Every time the administration is asked, they act like there is and the funds are easy to obtain. Senator Sanford-Terry agreed and stated that the faculty don't have the resources to support their activities for promotion and tenure. The administration is not taking those factors into account right now. Faculty did not receive an official statement about the pause of tenure and promotion from the administration.

Trustee Young-Seigler mentioned that, in the past, each College was given \$2300 for each faculty for travel. The President has mentioned that if faculty needed to travel, they could use their grant funds, get money from the department, or apply for travel funds for a meeting. If the meeting was justifiable, and there was not a virtual option, then there would be limited funds made available. The Office of Academic Affairs has an approval process for travel, so interested faculty should apply. Senator George mentioned that there is also some Title III money that we can apply for to support travel. HB2194 is an institutional neutrality bill/termination without clause. It is basically setting up a system where a university can suspend faculty with tenure. What we are facing is part of a larger strategy, for which TSU is vulnerable. Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that he will communicate with Academic Affairs and also stated that all 10 LGIs are working together.

Senator George mentioned that Social Work Day on the Hill will be on Wednesday, March 25<sup>th</sup>, in Cordell Hall room 8A from 1:30-4:30. On that day, HB 2194 will be discussed. The students will stand up for the faculty and reiterate the importance of tenure.

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

Senator Aziz mentioned that his colleagues in the College of Agriculture have questions about the upcoming elections of new senators. Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that the maximum number of senators from each College can be 5.

Senator George asked if the Committee Chair elections would be held in April. Senator Ghosh replied that the new Senate Executive Committee elections will be in April, but the Committee Chair

elections will be in August. Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that all new senators are welcome to attend the Faculty Senate meeting in April.

Senator Izadi brought up the topic of a bill in Tennessee to stop tenure. Senator George replied that the bill was pulled this year, so it probably won't come back next year. A question was asked as to whether it is possible to lift the pause on tenure and go with the current policy before implementing the new policy. Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that he will bring it to the attention of Academic Affairs and encouraged the senators to email him with any concerns.

The next Faculty Senate meeting will be held on August 27, 2026.

Meeting adjourned at 3:52 PM.

Minutes recorded by Senator Sujata Guha, Secretary