

Tennessee State University
Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes
April 17, 2025

Present: Provost Robbie Melton, AVP Erik Schmeller, AVP Cheryl Seay, Mr. Robert Bohall, Dr. Charlise Anderson, Trustee Artenzia Young-Seigler, Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senator Reginald Archer, Senator Ahmed Aziz, Senator Carlos Beane, Dr. Charles Brown, Senator Kenneth Chilton, Senator Poliala Dickson, Senator Cynthia Gadsden, Senator Cynthia George, Senator Sagnika Ghosh, Senator Sujata Guha, Senator Mohammad Habibi, Senator Beatrice Harris, Senator Julie Huskey, Senator George Kakoti, Dr. Sarah Martinez-Sepanski, Senator Reynard McMillian, Senator Megan O'Neil, Senator Nsoki Phambu, Senator Sean Posey, Senator Ljerka Rasmussen, Senator Twianie Roberts, Senator Brian Russell, Senator Miranda Sanford-Terry, Mr. James Scholz, Dr. ZaDonna Slay, Senator Karen Smith, Senator Hongwei Si, Senator Martene Stanberry, and Senator Zufen Wang

Meeting started at 2:40 PM

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 2:40 PM.

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

Provost Melton mentioned that study week starts the week of April 21st. The week after that is final exams week leading to graduation. Graduate ceremony will be on Friday at Gentry Center and Undergraduate ceremony will be on Saturday. There will be 225 graduates for Friday night and 630 undergraduates on Saturday.

Final grades are due on May 8th. When grades are late, the university cannot confer the degrees and the students cannot move on.

There is a minimum class size limit for Maymester and summer school. Summer school must be self-supporting. In certain situations, the courses that do not meet the minimum rate can be prorated. If that class cannot pay for the faculty salary, the class cannot be offered. The university will operate 5 days a week over the Summer, as it will in the Fall.

There is an AI policy that was reviewed by legal and it will go up for approval at a special Board meeting at the end of April.

According to THEC, there is a formula for low producing programs and the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) will look at it overall five-year span. OAA identified 17 programs, met with all stakeholders, presented the information, and worked out a strategic plan. Out of the 17 programs, they are recommending 2 for sunset – Education Specialist degree in Instructional Leadership, as well as BS in Dental Hygiene. OAA had recommended the MS degree in Chemistry to sunset as well, but due to the needs of majors, they agreed to move that program to be inactive to give time for faculty to raise the enrollment. OAA also combined various degrees into concentrations or mergers. In summary, there were 2 programs recommended for sunset, 1 for inactive, and mergers for the rest.

The post-tenure review policy will move to the academic sub-committee and then the Board in June. There is an approved academic merit pay plan that was implemented about two years ago. Provost Melton recommended that we it be reviewed again and then presented after the post tenure review, followed by asking if there is any money for us to implement it, as we did two years ago.

Senator Dickson mentioned that she had applied for APIP last summer but didn't get it and asked the Provost to go back and look at the applications from last summer. Senator Dickson does not believe that those applications were reviewed. Provost Melton said that this year the university does not have the money. The university did not receive the \$154 million that President Tucker has requested. In moving forward., as we stabilize, that is a plan that we can then resubmit for academic merit pay.

Senator Chilton asked – how do we make sure that we have resources, as a university, to improve the research, etc., for those who may be found deficient? Provost Melton mentioned that she hopes that whoever has evaluated the faculty member outlines what resources they have to help. Dr. Quick ends up with carryover funds each year where people do not utilize the resources. We have an agreement with a consortium of over 250 federated universities that the faculty can use those resources. There are resources to have the faculty make those improvements. OAA plans to implement other ways of faculty recognition this Fall that may not be monetary.

Senator Ghosh stated that there is a pay parity. Within a particular department, when a new faculty is hired, that faculty is hired at a higher pay scale. She asked if that gap will close. Provost Melton mentioned that OAA has a committee looking at it. AVP Schmeller and, particularly, Trustee Young-Seigler has addressed compression. OAA has looked at salaries and saw discrepancies in some departments. When the university is are financially stable, there will be a plan to address those discrepancies.

Provost Melton stated that we are up in summer enrollment than we were in the past two years. We implemented the rule that students cannot come in with balances over the summer.

Integration of eLearn and Nuventive Platform · Mr. Robert Bohall and Dr. Cheryl Seay

Dr. Seay and Mr. Bohall from (Nuventive platform) mentioned that they met with assess coordinators from each area to introduce integrating the Nuventive platform. This will help with the overall assessment process.

Mr. Bohall provided a demonstration of another school (Washington Adventist University in DC) that integrated D2L in their Nuventive platform. Someone from Nuventive will work with TSU IT to get access to student data and render analytics. One view/module uses regular 0 to 100 percent grades. Another module used rubrics and outcomes. It is highly configurable. Whatever data is in D2L can be rendered in various ways. The platform also has a split screen user experience, which is very helpful.

Senator Aziz mentioned that we currently do Qualtrics survey; then analyze data and upload it in Nuventive. He asked - how much capability is there on eLearn in the D2L platform to do that? Senator Aziz stated that it will be great if we can upload our assessment data from eLearn, but he is not sure. AVP Seay mentioned that they can set up an offline meeting with Senator Aziz to go over that.

Senator Roberts asked if the system has any AI capacity built into it for program reviews? Getting the data and transposing it into a usable format for reporting purposes will be helpful. Is the university thinking of bringing those connections together so that it will make it easier for the faculty for accreditation purposes? Mr. Bohall stated that the company is aware of the desire of faculty to leverage AI, is are starting to head down those roads.

Dr. Slays asked – have you worked with institutions who have programs with additional assessment requirements for accrediting body? In some cases there may be data overlap and this platform would be beneficial. Can this help streamline our reporting for assessment to the University and our accrediting bodies? Dr. Anderson answered that the application works with two programs. It can be done and Nuventive can be used.

Approval of February 20, 2025 and March 20, 25 Meeting Minutes · Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senate Chair

A motion was made to approve the minutes of both meetings, and they were approved.

Election for Vacant Position · Nominations Committee Chair – Dr. Sagnika Ghosh · Senate Chair – Dr. Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi

Senator Ghosh received only one nomination for Vice-Chair – that of Senator Stanberry. The Nomination Committee met. Senator Stanberry is from the College of Life and Physical Sciences. Senator Stanberry was vetted and is in her first term, which will end in 2026. She is a tenured faculty and meets both criteria.

Senator Tiriveedhi proposed that we can take a voice vote to affirm Senator Stanberry's position as Vice-Chair. There was a unanimous voice vote that approve Senator Stanberry for the position of Vice-Chair. Senator Stanberry is now Vice-Chair and will be serving her term from April 2026. Asked to address senate by VT.

Senator Stanberry was asked to address the Senate. Senator Stanberry said that she is excited to serve and some of the qualities she has that will work well in this position. She mentioned that there is a lot of work to do, but she is up for the challenge.

Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that this is the last meeting for this semester and this academic year. Dr. Twianie Roberts, Ms. Julie Huskey, and Dr. Karen Smith will move out from Senate and new members will be added in August.

Faculty Trustee Report · Trustee Artenzia Young-Seigler, Past Senate Chair

There hasn't been a Board of Trustees meeting since March 2025.

Trustee Young-Seigler pointed out that there will be one special meeting on April 30 at 5:30 PM. She asked the senators to join by livestream. The TN Assembly has passed two legislative actions that will impact the structure of the Board. Both are amendments to current bills. Currently, there are 9 Board members. Now they will add two additional members to the Trustees. This is not just for TSU but for all Board of Trustees in the State of Tennessee. This is special amendment 0175. The next one is amendment 0268 – which amends the bill that outlines for TSU to use the deferred maintenance plans in their operations budget. Next is the AI policy, which the board will vote on. The Chair of Student Affairs requested another modification to the policy that will align with other institutions.

There will also be the usual Board of Trustees meeting on June 13th. The Senators should email related information to Trustee Young-Seigler no later than the first week of June to get in on Boards agenda. Another meeting of the Board will be scheduled in September, followed by a meeting in November.

Senator Dickson asked if the AI policy has been shared with faculty. Trustee Young-Seigler stated - possibly not. Senator George stated that she has the AI policy in her syllabu for two years now and asked if it changed. Trustee Young-Seigler answered that the policy in syllabus was a recommendation, but it was not an actual policy.

Post-Tenure Policy · Senator Kenneth Chilton

Senator Chilton mentioned that the Post-Tenure Review (PTR) Committee got the ball rolling with different formats – then Provost Melton discussed with Chairs and Deans and got more input and they came back out with another edit that Senator Tiriveedhi shared with everyone. The language now is now purely a trigger model, not mandatory. If faculty members have good annual reviews, they won't have to go through post-tenure review process. Senator Chilton mentioned that we need to be very involved in the selection of the next Provost. There needs to

be resources in helping those faculty members who may be found deficient in certain areas. The post-tenure review policy cannot be used to get rid of faculty members.

Senator Chilton stated that if overall there is failure to meet responsibility, it triggers post tenure review. If the faculty failed in one sub area – such as teaching, that could trigger. Failure to meet responsibilities for two consecutive years would be a trigger, and it would then be under the PTR plan.

AVP Schmeller mentioned that at first it was a one-year trigger – then they had a compromise conversation to use the HR policy that's already in place for a 2nd year improvement. AVP Schmeller thinks that they need to be reworded.

Senator Tiriveedhi asked Senator Chilton to put modified language in the chat. Senator Chilton said that he will have to think about how to rephrase it.

There was some confusion over the wording.

Senator Chilton put the original language used by the University of Memphis in chat – Post-tenure review will be initiated by the Provost when a faculty member has:

- received one overall annual performance rating of “**Failure to Meet Responsibilities**”; or

- received one annual performance rating of “**Failure to Meet Responsibilities**” in the sub score of “**Faculty Teaching**”; or

- received two overall annual performance ratings of “**Improvement Needed**” during any four consecutive Annual Performance Review cycles; or

- received two annual performance ratings of “**Improvement Needed**” during any four consecutive Annual Performance Review cycles in the sub score of “**Faculty Teaching**”. during any four consecutive Annual Performance Review cycles; or

Senator Ghosh asked - 1 annual professional rating within which time period?

Senator Roberts stated that we don't have any data in front of us. We don't know publication rates for ourselves, and need to raise our standards for tenure and promotion

Senator Phambu pointed out to Senator Chilton that the weight of teaching is different from weights of research and service. Failing in research is different from failing in teaching. Senator Phambu asked how this balance can be achieved.

Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that there should be a significant professional development for the Department Chair so that the Chair is able to fairly evaluate the faculty. Chairs should also be well trained to objectively evaluate faculty and keep personal preferences away.

Senator Roberts asked if the Faculty Senate will make recommendations to Academic Affairs and the University to put structured supports in place, or will it be just be left to the departments to get help for struggling individuals? Senator Tiriveedhi responded that this was discussed with the Provost and that the Provost assured us that the required support, depending on financial limitations, will be put for faculty improvement.

Senator Habibi stated that there is a big tension among colleagues in his Department and College. The colleagues think that it is a well laid out trap with lots of punishment but very little reward. The information can be interpreted in several different ways. Senator Habibi thinks that the process is being rushed and that we should step back and take a closer look.

Senator Tiriveedhi asked Senator Chilton if he would be willing to change the language in the PTR document.

Senator Archer put language in chat – PTR will be initiated by the Provost when a faculty member has during any four (4) consecutive Annual Performance Review cycles:

- received two (2) overall annual performance ratings of “**Failure to Meet Responsibilities**”; or
- received two (2) annual performance ratings of “**Failure to Meet Responsibilities**” in teaching, research, service, or disposition sub scores.
- received two (2) overall annual performance ratings of “**Improvement Needed**”; or
- received two (2) overall annual performance ratings of “**Improvement Needed**” in the sub score of “**Faculty Teaching**”.

AVP Schmeller mentioned that he had drafted this earlier but did not want to change the listing of criteria. He suggested that we remove the 4 points and use the language: Following the process already in place, if a faculty member receives a “failure to meet responsibilities/unacceptable” or “Improvement needed” during the annual performance review in teaching, research, service, or disposition, the faculty member goes on an improvement plan. During the following annual review if there has been no improvement, the PTR process begins.

Senator Chilton asked Provost Melton – if we vote and approve, will Academic Affairs agree with it and send it to the Board?

AVP Schmeller mentioned that as a tenured faculty member, he will push to stick to what we have. Let us try it and see what happens.

Senator Tiriveedhi proposed to move a motion and vote on it.

Senator Chilton made a motion to accept the most recent version with Senator Archer’s added language about four consecutive annual performance cycles. Senator Archer seconded it.

Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that now the motion is on the floor and moved forward with voting – there were 23 votes in favor, 0 opposed, and 3 abstains. The motion passed. The Faculty Senate we will adopt the post-tenure review policy. The latest draft sent by Senator Tiriveedhi will be forwarded to Academic Affairs.

Senator Tiriveedhi then proposed a motion to table the rest of the meeting agenda, since we ran out of time.

The next Faculty Senate meeting will be held on August 28, 2025. Meeting adjourned at 4:48 PM.

Minutes recorded by Senator Sujata Guha, Secretary