

**Tennessee State University**  
**Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes**  
**January 30, 2025**

Present: Provost Robbie, Melton, AVP Erik Schmeller, AVP Cheryl Seay, AVP Johnnie Smith, Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senator Reginald Archer, Senator Ahmed Aziz, Senator Carlos Beane, Dr. Charles Brown, Dr. Elizabeth Brown, Senator Kenneth Chilton, Senator Poliala Dickson, Dr. Donna Dopwell, Senator Cynthia Gadsden, Senator Cynthia George, Senator Sagnika Ghosh, Dr. Jemal Gishe, Senator Sujata Guha, Senator Retta Guy, Senator Mohammad Habibi, Senator Julie Huskey, Dr. Gary Jones, Senator Bill Johnson, Senator Natasha Johnson, Dr. Gary Jones, Senator George Kakoti, Dr. Ruth Kessa, Ms. Krystal Massey, Senator Reynard McMillian, Dr. Gina Obiakor, Senator Megan O'Neil, Senator Nsoki Phambu, Senator Sean Posey, Senator Ljerka Rasmussen, Senator Twianie Roberts, Senator Brian Russell, Dr. Sanjoy Saha, Senator Miranda Sanford-Terry, Senator Alex Sekwat, Senator Hongwei Si, Senator Jeffrey Siekpe, Dr. ZaDonna Slay, Senator Karen Smith, Senator Martene Stanberry, Senator Zufen Wang, Dr. Tokesha Warner, and Senator Artenzia Young-Seigler

Meeting started at 2:40 PM

A moment of silence was held for the student who passed away overnight due to being found unresponsive in the stairwell of Boyd Hall.

**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 2:42 PM.

President's Address to Faculty Senate · Interim President, Mr. Dwayne Tucker

President Tucker was not present at today's Faculty Senate meeting. Hence, Provost Melton shared the President's updates, as follows:

-The President wanted to share his plan of upcoming meetings.

- There is a Board of Trustees meeting on January 31<sup>st</sup> during which a consultant will give information on financial exigency and other board proceedings.
- The President's Office is having a discussion about our financial situation and presenting it to the legislature.
- On January 30<sup>th</sup> at 6 PM, there will be a forum in the Town Hall with alumni.
- On Feb 7<sup>th</sup>, there will be a student forum in the daytime.
- A parent forum will be held on a Sunday (date TBA).
- The President will also call a meeting with faculty and staff in terms of presenting information to the public.

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

Provost Melton asked faculty to verify attendance on Banner and thinks that certain discrepancies (such as attendances being reported but still showing as not reported) is a system problem.

Senator Bill Johnson mentioned that there was confusion on part of faculty regarding (1) attendance on Banner, (2) DegreeWorks updating, and (3) EAB alert. He stated that everyone should understand that Banner is tied to financial aid, while DegreeWorks, CPoS, and EAB are related to student retention.

Provost Melton mentioned that, due to our financial situation, consultants are evaluating our workload to ensure that people are documenting their full workload. There are 57 instructors assigned to classes with zero enrollment. Those classes should be canceled. The consultants are looking at student credit hour per faculty member. Provost Melton shared a final list of low-producing courses and mentioned that we are now aligned with THEC.

Senator McMillian asked if there is a percentage of student graduates on an annual basis. Provost Melton stated that our graduation rate is the lowest in the state. We are at 33% in a 6-year average. However, our retention rate over 5 years has increased. For the first time, we have 78.5% of students returning, which is the largest return rate of our freshman class.

Senator Chilton asked how the financial aid is being processed for timeliness on behalf of the students enrolled. Provost Melton mentioned that financial aid is being revised and THEC is on ground helping. SIG consulting agency has come in to see why it is taking so long to process financial aid. There are new systems coming in. Financial aid is the President's number one priority.

Senator Young-Seigler mentioned that (1) there has been a recent video on social media about students having received refund checks, but then they got a bill for more than that refund amount, and asked how we can handle such posts on social media that may not be positive for

TSU, and (2) how CPoS issues can be better identified and DegreeWorks updated. Provost Melton answered (1) The President has reorganized the vision and mission of the university's Public Relations (PR) office. There has been a change in PR staffing which was put in place last week. (2) There has been progress in CPoS and DegreeWorks, since the number of complaints in terms of CPoS and DegreeWorks has significantly decreased. TSU has hired a full-time scribe.

AVP Seay mentioned that it is the student's responsibility to ensure that their DegreeWorks is updated. The Office of Academic Affairs is there to help the students. If department chairs see something wrong, they should say something. There are deadlines for that. AVP Seay also mentioned about a communication plan using which they are trying to contact students. Ms. Kimi Bonner is coordinating a monitoring plan. The department chairs are given access to CPoS in Banner.

Provost Melton mentioned a recommendation to lock down registration so that the students can only take courses that are assigned. Financial aid will not be given if the courses are not part of the student's DegreeWorks. Senator Bill Johnson stated that there was an attempt to fix this problem before we had CPoS. If DegreeWorks could present to the students the next semester of recommended courses, it would make it easy for them to register.

Provost Melton also talked about shared governance and thanked us for ESP recommendation. She has forwarded the information to committees who will come back with their recommendations.

The Provost mentioned that Honors Convocation this Spring will be moved to Friday, so that it does not impact instructional time. Spring graduation will, most likely, be held in the Gentry Center.

Provost Melton also asked the departments to give input on the academic calendar.

Senator Natasha Johnson asked Provost Melton to speak about funds for research-related travel. Provost Melton stated that if the faculty have grant funds, the university will approve the travel requests. If faculty have travel related to accreditation, those requests will be approved, as well. If faculty can attend virtually, the university will fund the registration fees. More information about the financial status of the university will be known at the end of February. Provost Melton mentioned that, instead of group travel, only one faculty representative should go. There is \$2100 for individual travel.

Senator McMillian posed a question about student travel. Provost Melton stated that she will check, and asked Senator McMillian to email her.

Provost Melton also mentioned that there is a new system of 24-hour live telecounseling for the students, with live access to a real counselor and real doctor.

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

The Board of Trustees meeting is on January 31<sup>st</sup>. It will put us in a position to be an informed body of people about some of the issues happening now and in the future. It is an opportunity for us and the Senate to be educated and learn about financial exigency. Everyone is encouraged to be on the same page. The board meeting will be streamlined

A TSU event will also be held in February, during which a united front will be important to show to the lawmakers.

Senator Bill Johnson thanked Senator Young-Seiler and mentioned that (1) the Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC) requested and received a zoom meeting with the Chair of the Board of Trustees through Senator Young-Seigler, and (2) the FSEC requested a face-to-face meeting with President Tucker prior to the Spring Faculty Institute, and the President agreed. These things would not have been possible without a strong faculty representative, such as Senator Young-Seigler.

### Approval of Nov 21, 2024 Meeting Minutes and Committee Reports · Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senate Chair

The minutes of the November 21, 2024 meeting were approved by Senator Bill Johnson and seconded by Senator Cynthia Gadsden. The minutes will be posted on the Faculty Senate website soon.

#### Committee Reports-

Senator Phambu (Research Committee) – Senator Phambu was asked to talk about the Research Incentive Award. Senator Phambu mentioned that Dr. Quick has said that the award is on hold (paused, but not canceled). Dr. Quick has sent a letter to the university. Senator Phambu mentioned that he will recruit members for the Research Committee soon and will build a champion mindset proposal.

A discussion was held about the number of office hours faculty should hold. Senator Young-Seigler stated that the policy is that faculty must hold 10 office hours - 5 of those office hours could be in person and the remaining 5 could be virtual (technology hours). Senator Young-Seigler shared the office hours policy document and mentioned that faculty have to hold 1 hour per class in office. Senator Natasha Johnson mentioned that the goal of office hours is to be there for the students. Faculty should pick those hours. Selecting hours that are mutually beneficial to the faculty and students will help meet the student's needs. Senator Phambu stated that holding 10 office hours is detrimental to faculty productivity and creativity. If the university was to move

from R2 to R1, 10 office hours would be a problem, and the situation would need to be fixed. Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that we will have further discussion about it.

Senator Russell asked about online classes. Senator Bill Johnson stated that our customers are students and parents. The students come to campus to interact with the faculty members. We do a disservice by not being on campus. Classes should be in person.

Senator Russell (Student Appeals Committee) – the committee met. They got appeals done and turned into Student Affairs. There were 27 appeals this semester.

Senator Roberts (Curriculum Committee) – the committee did not meet this month, as there were no entries in Curriculog.

Senator Ghosh (Academic Committee) – Senator Ghosh has reached out to 5 members listed on the committee and will try to set up a meeting date.

Senator George (Benefits and Welfare Committee) – Senator George would like to have an updated list of committee members. Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that there would be no changes to that committee in AY 2024-2025.

Senator Sanford-Terry (Faculty Grievance Committee) – the committee has not received any grievance, which is why they did not meet. However, they may receive some grievance(s) in March and will update then.

Senator McMillian (Financial Aid Committee) – Senator McMillian reiterated that we should be mindful of the university's financial situation. There should be at least 10 students registered for a class for the class to meet. Senator Young-Seigler stated that summer school costs the university money, unless we go out and recruit students.

### Faculty Survey Report · Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senate Chair

There was a lot of work done related to the faculty survey report. The President met with Senator Tiriveedhi in December 2024. The President is a very outcomes-based person and is open to ideas. Several points on the faculty survey report has been on President's radar. There were 9 important concerns in the faculty survey report which should be addressed, as follows-

1. Transparency in hiring practices
2. Student financial aid
3. Customer-friendly student service
4. Administrative overreach
5. Lack of performance/merit recognition
6. Market-ready courses
7. Xenophobic behavior/non-inclusive practices

8. Four administrative divisions with major concerns – Finance and Budget, RSP, Student Services, and Information Technology
9. Workload/overload

Senator Tiriveedhi asked the senators to tell faculty that their concerns have been heard.

Senator Young-Seigler asked why the Faculty Senate does not take voice for adjuncts. Senator Tiriveedhi replied that, as a body, the Faculty Senate represents the faculty who voted for them, but nevertheless the Faculty Senate should be a voice for adjuncts.

Senator Tiriveedhi also mentioned that all committees will be revalidated in March this year. Senator Tiriveedhi will send emails to Deans, and all committee members will be elected during the college meetings. The deans will send Senator Tiriveedhi the excel sheet with all committee members from the colleges. There will be two elections – (1) for committees at the end of March and (2) for new senators by April. There will not be any more hand-picking, but instead, a Qualtrics survey will be sent to the faculty. Senator Roberts mentioned that the Qualtrics survey needs to go out before the voting process. Senator Habibi requested that the senators be copied when Senator Tiriveedhi sends emails to the deans.

### Other Concerns

Senator Chilton mentioned that they have not heard anything about reserves or endowment. A request should be made for signed contracts to determine how much money, in indirect costs, the research grants are bringing on. This should be taken up with the Research Committee. Senator Tiriveedhi asked Senator Chilton and Senator Phambu to look into this matter, along with Senator McMillian. Senators Phambu, Chilton, and McMillian would be part of a three-member committee to investigate research gaps and provide an update to the Senate during the next meeting.

Senator Bill Johnson stated that a request was made to HR about faculty, staff, and administrative salaries. That request is in process.

### Closing Comments and Adjournment · Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senate Chair

The next Faculty Senate meeting will be held on February 20, 2025.

Meeting adjourned at 4:44 PM.

Minutes recorded by Senator Sujata Guha, Secretary