

**Tennessee State University**  
**Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes**  
**February 20, 2025**

Present: Provost Robbie Melton, AVP Erik Schmeller, AVP Cheryl Seay, AVP Johnnie Smith, Trustee Artenzia Young-Seigler, Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senator Reginald Archer, Senator Ahmed Aziz, Senator Kenneth Chilton, Dr. LaPorchia Davis, Senator Poliala Dickson, Senator Cynthia Gadsden, Senator Cynthia George, Senator Sagnika Ghosh, Senator Sujata Guha, Senator Retta Guy, Senator Beatrice Harris, Senator Julie Huskey, Dr. Bill Johnson, Senator Natasha Johnson, Senator George Kakoti, Dr. Margaret Machara, Senator Reynard McMillian, Dr. Anis Mnif, Dr. Veronica Oates, Senator Megan O'Neil, Senator Nsoki Phambu, Senator Ljerka Rasmussen, Senator Twianie Roberts, Senator Brian Russell, Senator Miranda Sanford-Terry, Senator Hongwei Si, Senator Jeffrey Siekpe, Senator Karen Smith, 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 2:45 PM.

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

Provost Melton spoke about DEI – they had just received word that they must identify all DEI programs activity, events, scholarships, offices. Right now, the government is going through every federal grant to see which ones have DEI. They have a list of words and are running a bot – and if there is a DEI activity, people are getting noted and the impact will be on federal dollars.

TSU Attorney Jeanette Brown is compiling it to see who is safe and who is not. Ni DEI initiatives (black man initiative, black female initiative, etc.) will be funded. There is an impact with our Ag science program in terms of funding. The impact is real and is happening.

Dr. Bill Johnson mentioned that they are also looking at our catalog and syllabi. Provost Melton confirmed that they may ask for all our syllabi. Any diversity and multicultural courses have

been tagged already. We are a public institution, and we must adhere by our State rule. We have a mandate regarding DEI and those types of programs.

Senator Chilton asked whether Black History Month would no longer be observed or allowed. Black history was a talk of conversation federally. Provost Melton answered that she does not know but she is not hopeful for next year.

Senator Ghosh gave an example – suppose a solicitation for NSF was computer information systems directorate under minority serving institution, and asked if that would be under scrutiny? Provost Melton answered in the affirmative and stated that some have been stopped. Senator Ghose also mentioned that last year there was funding for clean energy education, which has 2 phases, and asked if they can use the money toward curriculum. Provost Melton advised to spend that money right now.

Senator Roberts mentioned that in the College of Education she came out of a THEC program review. They are now going through DOE/K3. They have a standard that says to increase student DEI. Senator Roberts asked if the State will catch up with the federal government. Provost Melton advised to do nothing until the College of Education gets the official email from Academic Affairs, but just to keep in mind that such an email is probably going to come.

Senator McMillian asked if TSU's land grant status is in question. Provost Melton replied that they don't know.

Senator Archer asked what would happen next if we had a list of grants and now being told to stop. Provost Melton replied that this is the first time ever she has seen anything like this unfold. But as soon as she knows, she will let us know.

Dr. Bill Johnson mentioned that a couple of days ago in the Kentucky legislature, anti DEI bill was introduced – all the way down to using facilities. He fully expects the same type of language to trickle off the Hill, until and if the courts step in.

Senator Ghosh stated that Provost Melton had mentioned that if there is no directive yet, we should try to spend the money. She asked how that could be navigated. Provost Melton stated that it is different with ESP and offered to connect Senator Ghosh to Dr. Quick in Research and Sponsored Programs for guidance.

Provost Melton – number 2 – request was sent out for recommendation/feedback about Friday classes. With chairs, there are a lot of concerns. We are going to have an emergency meeting about Friday classes. It was a directive that we return to Friday classes. We excluded graduate school. We were basically looking at undergraduate classes and general education classes. In pulling information and going to all stakeholders, we will still not get 100% consensus. Early registration starts on March 26 for Summer and Fall. If anyone sees major flaws, that information should be sent to AVP Schmeller.

Low producing programs – Provost Melton met with faculty, deans, chairs, students and presented the list to us. She is pleased to share that the list was presented with some modifications of phaseout. The good news is that some of the low producing programs are good for now.

Academic calendar – we have academic calendar for 25-26 but we can't base our calendar on MNPS. Students must come back to take their final exams. On the first day of class students should be let know that they have to come back.

Post tenure – we are the only school basically without a post tenure policy. We want to move forward with that.

Summer school - In the past we had money and schools to give to students. Now we don't have money and there will be no schools. We can still have Maymester, but it will have to be self-sustaining. Also, the students cannot have a balance – if they do, then they won't be able to register. We will get a survey for feedback for virtual summer school. The decision of whether classes will be online or on the ground has not been made yet. Right now, the university is doing a survey to determine impact and will make a decision within 10 days. There might be some exceptions.

1000-2000 level = minimum 20 students

3000-4000 level = minimum 15 students

Graduate level = minimum 10 students

Senator Archer stated that we have classes listed with certain names and certain curriculum and asked if we expect those classes to be canceled. Provost Melton answered no for now and asked to keep going until we got something official.

Senator Russell mentioned that during pandemic we moved online, and asked if they can still do synchronous virtual through zoom. AVP Seay stated that we will have to lift our requirements over the summer and call it remote learning.

Senator Roberts had a question about DEI aligned courses and the state or national standards that oversee them. She will send Provost Melton an email.

Senator Chilton gave an example - suppose a book says “color of law” but the course does not say DEI – will it go up to the microscopic level? Provost Melton stated that right now there are certain books that have been banned. Nothing is certain.

Senator Archer asked - if our CVs use such language, publications, etc., do we need to hide them? Provost Melton mentioned that we just have to make sure that our voices are being heard, and we work together.

### Approval of Jan 30, 2025 Meeting Minutes · Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senate Chair

The minutes of the January 30, 2025 meeting were approved.

## Senate Emergency Meeting (Feb 14, 2025): Report and Discussion · Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senate Chair

The Senate emergency meeting was held on Valentine's Day from 1:30 PM. There was a heated discussion. As Senate Chair, Senator Tiriveedhi received two grievances on FSEC committee members, Dr. Bill Johnson and Dr. Kenneth Chilton – related to the inability of the two FSEC members to participate in April 2024 senate elections given to the role they received in the current FSEC. During any academic year, after the Faculty-Staff Institute meetings in August, deans provide number of positions for the senate to the Senate Chair. By March, college elections should be held in all colleges. For Dr. Chilton's case, 1st term was from 2020-2022, and second term from 2022-2024. For Dr. Chilton, the senate position was elected by the college for the 3<sup>rd</sup> term – however, there was a problem with the language. Dr. Chilton was put as “alternate,” which was a clerical issue. Dr. Chilton satisfies the College of Public Service election requirements, so the grievance was withdrawn. Dean Stanley mentioned that Dr. Chilton was elected unanimously. A similar approach was taken toward Dr. Bill Johnson. In the past, Dr. Johnson had blocked a report from a senator. That senator has caught Bill Johnson off guard. Senator Tiriveedhi did not initiate any of these actions. He sent an email to Dean Barredo who stated that Dr. Bill Johnson is not an elected senator in the College of Health Sciences. We should not use the senate floor as a battleground. How Senator Tiriveedhi was elected does not reflect anything similar to Dr. Bill Johnson's election. A non-senator cannot be a Vice-Chair. This is not about a person, but about a college. The issue is important. Senator Tiriveedhi will support a scientific evidence-based report. The grievance is still on the table, and Senator Tiriveedhi wants the disposition for the grievance. The following notes were listed from the College of Health Sciences: College violation with 6 senators, Senate non-compliance, and Non-senator as senate vice-chair: wrong precedence.

Dr. Bill Johnson put in chat – Faculty trustee is an ex officio member of the FSEC and has NO VOTE. The report was embargoed by the FSEC.

Senator Young-Seigler replied in chat – Trustee is NOT an Ex-Officio of the Senate or FSEC.

Senator Young-Seigler mentioned that our nominations committee did not follow through on their charge and they did not vet the candidates in April, which led to confusion. At the time of the elections, they had to beg plead people to add names to the list. They had a hard time getting anyone to nominate themselves. Trustee Young-Seigler hopes that we don't have to go through it again. Everyone's participation is needed. 1. The Committee did not vet the candidates properly. 2. There are no positions in our constitution for committee chairs or executive officers to not be a senator. Trustee Young-Seigler mentioned that a person must be a senator to serve as an officer of the senate.

Dr. Bill Johnson stated that the faculty constitution is silent as to whether anyone other a committee chair has to be a senator. He also stated that he was a sitting senator in April.

Trustee Young-Seigler replied that Dr. Bill Johnson was an outgoing senator which made him ineligible.

Dr. Bill Johnson stated that it is not how the constitution reads, and that it was written by a senator who is a lawyer. He encouraged Senator Tiriveedhi to send the constitution legal for review.

Senator Chilton wrote – Notwithstanding the term limitations of paragraph (e)(1), any Senator who may be elected as Vice Chair after serving one term in the Senate, may serve an additional two-year term (for a total of six years) to fulfill the obligations of his or her office. (Amended 8-5-2020 #1).

Senator Chilton proposed a motion to send the constitution to legal (University Counsel), make a motion to determine who's qualified, and to remove those who are not qualified. The motion passed and the constitution will be sent to the University Counsel under the directorship of the Nominations Committee.

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

Trustee Young-Seigler mentioned that during the previous SBC meeting, the President made clear that we are not in a position to file for financial exigency yet. Next Board of Trustees meeting is on March 14, 2025.

### Committee Reports · Committee Chairs · Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senate Chair

Senator Ghosh (Academic Committee) – she reached out to previous members, but they don't have a quorum – she has confirmation from 3 members.

Senator Russell (Student Appeals Committee) – they had majority vote last week.

Senator Roberts (Curriculum Committee) – they maintain whatever the current numbers are from the college in terms of the Faculty Senate and that is to be abided and followed.

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

AVP Schmeller stated the following-

Procedure I-25.16: Class Cancellation

The following minimum enrollments are required by the University for Summer

<u>Level</u>	<u>Enrollment</u>
600, 700 and 800	10 students
500	10 students
300 and 400	15 students
100 and 200	20 students
TN eCampus- Undergraduate	25 students (set by TBR)
TN eCampus- Graduate	15 students (set by TBR)

Senator Roberts mentioned the following-

Education - The CAEP Standards for Accreditation at the Advanced-Level and their components flow from two principles:

1. Solid evidence that the provider's graduates are competent and caring educators.
  2. There must be solid evidence that the provider has the capacity to create a culture of evidence and use it to maintain and enhance the quality of the professional programs they offer.
- **Standard RA.1: Content and Pedagogical Knowledge** The provider ensures that candidates for professional specialties develop an understanding of the critical concepts and principles of their discipline and facilitates candidates' reflection of their personal biases to increase their understanding and practice of equity, diversity, and inclusion. The provider is intentional in the development of their curriculum for candidates to demonstrate their ability to effectively work with diverse P-12 students and their families.

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

Meeting adjourned at 4:45 PM.

Minutes recorded by Senator Sujata Guha, Secretary