

Tennessee State University
Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes
March 20, 2025

Present: Provost Robbie Melton, AVP Erik Schmeller, AVP Cheryl Seay, Trustee Artenzia Young-Seigler, Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senator Reginald Archer, Senator Ahmed Aziz, Senator Carlos Beane, Dr. Ileana Brandt, Dr. Charles Brown, Senator Kenneth Chilton, Dr. Arvazena Clardy, Dr. LaPorchia Davis, Senator Poliala Dickson, Ms. Rita Fleming, Senator Cynthia Gadsden, Senator Cynthia George, Senator Sagnika Ghosh, Dr. Jemal Gishe, Senator Sujata Guha, Senator Retta Guy, Senator Mohammad Habibi, Senator Beatrice Harris, Senator Julie Huskey, Dr. Tim Jones, Senator Natasha Johnson, Senator George Kakoti, Dr. Margaret Machara, Dr. Elaine Martin, Dr. Sarah Martinez-Sepanski, Senator Reynard McMillian, Dr. Veronica Oates, Senator Megan O'Neil, Dr. Adebayo Oyebade, Senator Nsoki Phambu, Senator Sean Posey, Senator Ljerka Rasmussen, Senator Twanie Roberts, Senator Brian Russell, Ms. Kaleena Sales, Senator Miranda Sanford-Terry, Mr. James Scholz, Senator Alex Sekwat, Dr. Jason Smith, Senator Karen Smith, Senator Hongwei Si, Senator Jeffrey Siekpe, Senator Karen Smith, Senator Martene Stanberry, Senator Zufen Wang, and Dr. Tokesha Warner

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 sent out the items she plans to review and address. Most are informational, some require for us to get feedback as stakeholders. There were concerns that faculty members were not receiving information from chairs, deans, etc. Provost Melton requested to share information with faculty.

In spirit of shared governance, Provost Melton wants people to know. When she finds out information she shares with chairs, executive boards, and senators. We are at the SACSCOC 5th year report and still have several items where we are in the red and 3 items where we are totally

in the red. That 3rd draft is due in June and the final report is due March 2026 (seems long way away, but its not).

There is a new budget review process (TBR, consultants - Alvarez and Marsal). Deans will present overview of FY 2026 budget and 5-year overview of college expenditures with new up-to-date organizational chart. The Dean will present his/her case and justification of upcoming budget. We are still under a financial crisis. Therefore, they are only looking at critical mission position. We requested 154 million to get us moving for next year. It requires TSU to do various activities – benchmark, guidelines, cost reduction, program reduction, faculty-student credit hour production. Every faculty member will be evaluated in terms of their workload and student credit hour production. Provost Melton will call a special meeting with us once she has received more info from the consultants. We're looking at student credit hour production. 17 programs were identified as low producing. Academic Affairs recommended sunset/termination of 2 of the 17 programs. Some programs will change classification and will be merged.

Board of Trustees has asked for a curriculum degree workforce alignment. Somehow the perception is that our curriculum is old and not at par. Our dean has a worksheet to list the workforce partners and career mapping in terms of the workforce.

We should make sure our workloads are up to date and correct.

Faculty Senate has submitted at post ten review draft policy. The President and Provost Melton reviewed and added in other recommendations based on recommendations of other LGI's and sister universities. This draft was shared with us to review. The end result will be for a post tenure policy to go forward to the Board of Trustees this June for presentation and for review. We should review and address the issue of the post tenure policy.

For the first time last year, Provost Melton introduced an evaluation instrument of the administrators. We will also have an updated administrative review process. Each year we must complete an annual evaluation. If there is satisfactory evaluation for 5 years, in the 6th year the faculty will go to post-ten review. However, if there is unsatisfactory rating, it may trigger an early post ten review process. If administrators receive 2 years in a row unsatisfactory rating, it will also trigger a committee to review the admins. The goal is educational excellence for teaching and administration. Provost Melton is asking chairs to evaluate on behalf of advising – how faculty advise students in terms of Degree Works and CPoS. Attendance, EAB, midterms, and final grades will be considered while evaluating faculty.

For poor performing classes, Academic Affairs is looking at retention and progression which leads to graduating rates. They are trying to identify courses with poor performance. The Office of Academic Affairs wants to help faculty and students. There is a direct correlation between retention and progression rates.

Provost Melton has asked Dr. Jewell Winn to oversee a task force, which is a volunteer of 20 people willing to jump in to improve graduation rates. Our stakeholders, legislators, and community people are looking for action and process in a year. We have to come together to move that target of a 6-year graduation rate of 30% (measurement from THEC). If we use only the 4-year graduation rate of TSU, it is only 15%. We have to start right now addressing what we can do for TSU.

Summer and Fall registration will start next week. Provost Melton will push hard for our students to come back to us. They can't come back to us with a prior balance. Students with balances will not be able to attend Summer school or Fall.

Honors convocation – next Friday, March 28.

Final grade posting – Provost Melton will send out information.

Graduation – will be in Gentry Center. Friday night for graduates and Saturday night for undergraduates (close to 726).

May semester and summer school – we must adhere to minimum class sizes.

Return to Friday classes – in Fall 2025.

Academic calendar – there was a major conflict and the academic calendar is now revised. Homecoming week will be moved down. Fall break will be October 21 and 22 – Monday and Tuesday. Homecoming football agreement that was signed with Howard must take place on the 18th.

DEI – we continue to receive new information. We must change and modify our website with up-to-date information.

Senator Chilton asked on post tenure review policy – if they get to a point where the policy is not stringent or doesn't have certain features, how does it get resolved? Provost Melton stated that we are getting to the mellow point where they are looking at best practices. She would ask that the committee send out the draft now so that people can read it and add input. Then Academic Affairs will meet with the Post Tenure Review Committee to discuss again after which it will go to the President and the Board of Trustees.

Senator Posey asked stated that he taught 3 classes at TSU and noticed that students are not involved – he does everything he can, but students don't respond to emails. He asked what the steps are to make sure that the students do not drop out. Is there a specific group in the university that we can report them to? Provost Melton mentioned that students start fading out in the Spring. Those students should be reported to EAB. EAB is not only for grades. If we put this on EAB it gets triggered all the way to the student success specialist – they will search for the students and get them engaged.

Senator Rasmussen asked if there is a possible solution to the problem of disengagement and the use of cell phones. Students who take introduction to general education classes don't pay attention at the end of the first month. They have headphones on at all times. Provost Melton stated that is an individual faculty decision. Some faculty use cell phones as an instructional tool. Instructor has right to put individual policy on syllabus. University cannot put a no cell phone policy.

Trustee Young-Seigler mentioned that we used to have professional development that talked about this practice in the classroom. It may benefit a new instructor to have those best practice sessions training. These kids bring their disengagement practices from high school in higher

education. AVP Seay stated that there is a faculty development event during opening of Fall and Spring, and faculty are encouraged to attend.

Senator Johnson asked with regard to advising, if it is possible for us to have a structured time period where faculty know that this is advising week, so that we can streamline those services? Provost Melton stated that we have the new 2+2 advising model where freshman and sophomore are advised from the student success center who has a set time. Provost Melton will get together with the Chairs Council. Colleges and departments have hands on advising for juniors and seniors.

Senator Gadsden stated that it had been a timing issue in terms of faculty development events and suggested for them to be held a week or so before classes start. AVP Seay stated that the main event is a day after Faculty Institute – but that may clash with department meeting or college meeting. They will try to do a better job of coordinating a day in the week that will be open for the faculty (before school starts).

Provost Melton mentioned that we have had 3 changes in leadership and it has not even been a year. But she's still energized and hopeful that we will receive the 154 million.

Approval of Feb 20, 2025 Meeting Minutes · Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senate Chair

Senator Guha gave update – several files along with the February 20 meeting minutes had been missing from the work computer. IT was finally able to recover the files, and thus the meeting minutes would be presented next month.

Note on vacant positions · Senate Chair – Dr. Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi · Nominations Committee Chair – Dr. Sagnika Ghosh

Senator Archer mentioned that the Vice-Chair position is vacant. Based on investigation, it was determined that Dr. Bill Johnson is not eligible to serve as Vice Chair, since the election was invalid.

Senator Tiriveedhi stated that this completed the disposition of grievance, and that Senator Ghosh would be assisted by her committee members, as well as by Dr. Guha and Senator Archer, to fill the vacancy.

Senator Ghosh mentioned that just today one of the members emailed her that she no longer wishes to be part of the committee – so now they have 2 committee members. They will have elections on vacant positions on April 17th. That person will take over the position of chair of faculty senate in April 2026 (to April 2028).

Senator Dickson asked if we nominate ourselves, does it mean that we have to be in the first terms or will we run out of time? Senator Tiriveedhi answered that the person should be a senator for 2025-2026.

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

The Board of Trustees met last week for 3 days (Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday). A livestream of the meeting was available. All the meetings were recorded. Trustee Young-Seigler encouraged us to look at the meeting documents and watch the recordings. The Board of Trustees has ensured that all materials presented to the Board is available to everyone.

Finance Committee met on Wednesday from 4-6 PM – financial exigency training took place on Jan 31st. Right now, financial exigency is not a plan but as President Tucker says, everything is on the table. The President has outlined a 5-year financial plan – included for legislature to use remaining funds appropriated for our operating budget. We have already used some of the funds allocated to us. We still have 294 million waiting to be appropriated. The President is looking to work with the on how that money will be used. We are still in the business of making cost reductions. Everything is on the table.

Scholarships – money that were allocated for schools in 2022 was not sustainable. Now the university is having to make up that money. So TSU intends to keep its promise to students made in the past to allow them to matriculate. We cannot offer more than 20% of the revenue brought in to the university in scholarships. There will be an imposed cap on the discount rate we can give to the freshman classes.

THEC sets the binding range for mandatory tuition and fee hikes. We will find out how much THEC says we can raise tuition. Currently TSU's tuition is lower than everybody else's tuition.

The Audit Committee is working on reconciling audit findings and working through them.

Student and Academic Affairs Committee reviewed AI policy – has been sent to Provost Melton for review and revision and will be given to the Board of Trustees to approve. We must have an AI policy.

Sterling Sanders has been named as Interim CTO.

Jerome Oglesby serves as advisor to President. He adds expertise to our IT issues. We have over 400 people at TSU that are responsible for managing content on our website. They address website compliance and IT audit issues.

We have a webmaster – Tracey Jennette.

Presidential search has been paused and there will be an update moving forward in June.

Senator Russell stated that it was projected that our enrollment would decline in the next few years and then it would recover afterward, but the President did not talk about long term plan. Senator Russell asked what the long-term plan is within 5 years. Trustee Young-Seigler stated that it was addressed during the Finance Committee Meeting – they talked about proforma over the next 5 years. They projected that there would be a decrease in enrollment over the next 5 years, but this is not etched in stone. Just because there is a drop in enrollment does not mean that there is a drop in revenue.

Senator Archer asked if there is a timeline when the presidential search will pick up, and why it was paused. Trustee Young-Seigler mentioned that it has been suspended, since we want President Tucker to finish what he has started. He has given a 5-year plan. He has developed a great relationship with people at the Capitol and to try to bring another person to restart that relationship, it would not be good. Right now, it's the best decision to keep him.

Senator Dickson stated that in her unit there were questions related to the President's comment about promotion. He said that the university is not going to match the living increases to what the State provides. Trustee Young-Seigler mentioned that the State makes a certain amount of money available for salary (2.6% for the salary pool). However, we don't get the whole 2.6% from the State; we only get around half of that. The university has to make up the other half. The rest has to come out of the university budget. Right now, we don't have that money.

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

Senator Roberts (Curriculum Committee) – there was an issue/concern. They met this past week and talked about Curriculum entries. Discussion was about what the appropriate level of discussion was and who will make the decision about the full scope of curriculum matters? AVP Schmeller said that that kind of decision should be made by the content experts.

Senator Russell stated that if we just defer to the discipline then there's no check. At some place there needs to be some type of check. Senator Roberts stated that it's what the Curriculum Committee will do moving forward.

Senator Chilton (Research Report) – showed some PowerPoint slides which included data, total competitive grant funding (2019-2024), and indirect costs (in millions). Senator Tiriveedhi pointed out that those are the total amounts (direct plus indirect costs) of our grants that we have received. Those are the amounts of competitive grants. Those numbers were officially from the Finance and Budget Office.

Senator Tiriveedhi asked Senator Chilton to share the report return with him, which he will share with all senators. Senator Tiriveedhi also stated what we will save the questions for next session in the interest of time.

Post-Tenure Policy Discussion · Senator Kenneth Chilton

Senator Chilton showed slides – dug into other policies throughout the state of Tennessee. The draft they have is just a starting point. It has not been vetted. It is not a process of going through tenure fully again. Given the current political environment, once we get tenure, we still need to focus on being productive – that's the motivation behind it. Activities should be aligned with what our department and college have in place. If we are doing well in the annual department reviews right now, we should be relatively safe. If we get less than stellar reviews, there should be mediation. For states who did it, it has not led to the wholesale firing of faculty. The Post Tenure Review Committee started looking at other states and TBR universities use the same

policy. Those policies have been vetted. Then there are trigger models, like the University of Memphis model, which is triggered by annual review. At the University of North Carolina, if faculty exceeds expectation on a review, they are then referred to the Provost for potential rewards. Senator Chilton shared slides about the Trigger Model, possible actions taken by the Provost against faculty not meeting expectations, and a professional development plan.

Senator Tiriveedhi asked the senators to take this information to their units. Which model does your unit favor and why? Trigger model or Mandatory/regular model (end of 5th year review or at the end of 6th year we have outcome). Do we have a standardized university-wide evaluation? Remediation plan requires resources – how do we ask for resources? How much to put in remediation plan? Also, tenure and promotion are two different things.

The next Faculty Senate meeting will be held on April 17, 2025.

Meeting adjourned at 4:41 PM.

Minutes recorded by Senator Sujata Guha, Secretary