

Tennessee State University
Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes
September 18, 2025

Present: Provost Robbie Melton, AVP Erik Schmeller, Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senator Reginald Archer, Senator Ahmed Aziz, Senator Kenneth Chilton, Senator Poliala Dickson, Senator Cynthia George, Senator Sagnika Ghosh, Senator Sujata Guha, Senator Retta Guy, Senator Mohammad Habibi, Senator George Kakoti, Jr., Dr. Margaret Machara, Senator Reynard McMillian, Senator Megan O'Neil, Senator Sean Posey, Senator Ljerka Rasmussen, Senator Brian Russell, Senator Miranda Sanford-Terry, Senator James Scholz, Senator Hongwei Si, Senator Martene Stanberry, and Senator Zufen Wang.

Meeting started at 2:30 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 2:30 PM.

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

Provost Melton was pleased to share that we are half way through the finish line. Our Board of Trustees voted for our colleagues that are going up for tenure and promotion to move them forward and the approval of the policy. At the meeting Senator Chilton and Senator Tiriveedhi presented their information. AVP Schmeller represented the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA). Provost Melton wants Senator Tiriveedhi to send the information out once it is approved. Senator Tiriveedhi thanked Provost Melton for all her hard work and leadership.

AVP Schmeller commented on NIA – Faculty Senate had fought for NIA many years ago but given last years instability they had to put a pause on it. After consulting with Provost Melton and looking at the figures, OAA is able to offer NIA again in a limited capacity for the 2026-2027 AY. The faculty will only be awarded full salary for a semester – which will be the Spring semester of 2027. Enrollment often fluctuates during Fall, which is why OAA opted for Spring 2027.

Senator Dickson asked if a faculty will still have the option to take half of salary for the full year. AVP Schmeller answered “no.” Senator Dickson also asked when eLearn will shell open up for faculty to apply for NIA. Senator Tiriveedhi answered that the senate executive committee will talk to Dr. Seay and open it up in 2-3 weeks. By the next senate meeting, we will have a more solid announcement.

Senator Chilton asked if there is anything we need to take back to our departments in light of the current events. AVP Schmeller encouraged folks to be aware of what they are saying and writing on public platforms.

Approval of August 28, 2025 Meeting Minutes · Senator Sujata Guha, Senate Secretary

A motion was made to approve the minutes the August 28 meeting, and it was approved.

Faculty Trustee Report · Trustee Artenzia Young-Seigler

Since Trustee Young-Seigler was in a Board of Trustees meeting, Senator Tiriveedhi asked to keep this agenda item and move forward.

Committee Reports · Senate Standing and *Ad hoc* Committee Chairs

Senator Tiriveedhi showed the vacancy list of Faculty Senate committee chairs and asked all those who will be chairs or are chairs to meet with their committees before September 18. The names of the members are posted on the faculty senate website. The following are the committee names along with their chairs (either continuing or new)-

Academic Committee – Senator Ghosh. The committee met on September 15, and about 10 members were present. The members introduced themselves and there were questions from the committee members about the process. They also have some priorities for Fall 2025 and Spring 26, such as PTR policy, etc. The committee will review the faculty handbook thoroughly, point out where there are gaps, and work on the priorities. They will tackle two priorities this semester and two priorities next semester.

Budget Committee – Senator McMillian. The committee met on September 11 and 6 members attended. They want to get overall financial update from CFO and go from there. The committee members also want to address the remainder of \$554 million from the State. They are also focusing on the Foundation report – what is going on with endowment. Perhaps the Director of the Foundation can give an update for the next 3-5 years. There was a question about additional student fees for a program. The committee is also trying to get a feel about how grants accounting operates and impacts the budget.

Alumni Relations and Development Committee – Senator Dickson will roll off and Senator McMillian volunteered to serve as the new chair via self-nomination. The motion was approved.

Constitution and Bylaws Committee – Senator O’Neil. The committee met on September 12, with 7-8 members, and had big agenda for this year. They are looking at (1) Faculty workload and comparing with faculty operating manual; (2) PTR being enacted in the near future should be added to faculty handbook, looking at what the termination policy is; (3) Create something that will be more explicit about how the committee members are appointed; and (4) Implementing term limits for the committees and creating some language for that in the faculty handbook.

Curriculum Committee – Senator Sanford-Terry. The committee members have been finalized and she will send everyone a follow up email. The Curriculum Committee met twice. They had a discussion with a guest speaker for proposals that they have been reviewing. The committee members are currently and actively reviewing proposals – most of them are for Architectural Engineering. Next month the committee will be reviewing proposals from Art, Music, Management, and Business. Senator Tiriveedhi pointed out that there has been a clog in the movement of the process, and they would need to move quickly.

Grievance and Appeals Committee – Senator Sanford-Terry. The committee agreed to review the extra service pay policy as there is an inconsistency in the applications. The committee will meet during the week of September 22nd. The committee has discussed with AVP Schmeller about a chain of command that a faculty member might have so that fac have a mechanism of protecting themselves in case a feedback might not be positive, or an administrator may have overstepped their boundaries.

Faculty Benefits Committee – Senator Dickson. Only 7 people attended the committee meeting, so they didn’t have a quorum. The committee will focus on paid family leave policy. HR has been implemented a new paid family leave policy. This new policy aligns with our other care institutions in Tennessee. The Faculty Benefits Committee will approach HR and recommend that the policy reflected on the HR website should be in alignment with the new policy being implemented. They will also request that HR review and update all the policies on their website. Senator O’Neil and her committee are reviewing the faculty workload policy. Other proposed actions are to discuss the policy of chairs training when they create workloads for faculty as well as some faculty training so that faculty can talk for themselves. The committee also discussed about NIA.

Nominations and Appointment Committee – Senator Ghosh. The committee has not met yet but will try to meet before the next senate meeting. Senator Tiriveedhi said that for this committee, majority of work will be in the spring. He asked Senator Ghosh to have the committee ready along with a policy for all committee members.

IT Committee – Senator Phambu (not present to provide an update).

Library Committee – Senator Scholz. The committee did not yet have a chance to meet, and he is not aware of who the current members are. He needed clarification. Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that all committee members are listed on the faculty senate website. If any members are not interested, they can find a replacement.

Professional Development Committee – Senator Chilton. The committee met on September 10, and there were 6-8 people. Their goal is to determine what they can do on campus to give

scholars and faculty opportunity to present their work. Travel money is an issue. Another issue is the post-tenure review mediation – what the expectations are if someone does not meet teaching expectations, and what the university can provide to help faculty members get up to par in terms of meeting expectations if they need improvement.

Student Appeals Committee – Senator Russell. The committee met twice over the summer and dealt with summer and fall appeals. They have actively reviewed student appeals and will be meeting again in late December to decide about the Spring. There are 38 appeals for the Fall and 11 for the Summer.

Research Committee – Senator Phambu (not present to provide an update).

Post Tenure Review Committee – Senator Chilton. The committee met today (September 18), changed the wording of the post-tenure review, and sub-committee approved it. They are moving to the Board of Trustees for tomorrow's meeting.

Ad hoc Non-Instructional Assignment (NIA) Committee – Senator Posey. The committee did not have any meetings, due to the uncertainty around NIA as to whether it will be initiated. They will discuss in the future.

Fair Funding Committee – Senator McMillian. The committee would need to figure out what the plan is and move forward.

Resolution on SHARED GOVERNANCE · Senator Kenneth Chilton

Senator Chilton mentioned that last time we discussed reaffirmation of the Faculty Senate's resolution for share governance. There was a minor grammatical error that was addressed; otherwise the rest of the content remains the same. One person suggested to be more direct and forceful about the resolution. Senator Chilton suggested that maybe the first resolution should be more teamwork instead of being "in the face." That is the only suggestion that was received. The motion in favor of shared faculty governance and leadership was moved forward and passed. The resolution on shared governance has been officially accepted by the Faculty Senate and will be shared with the Office of Academic Affairs, Provost's Office, President, and the Board of Trustees.

Senator Sanford-Terry requested that we submit a similar resolution every Fall semester. This is similar to what other universities' Faculty Senate do as a friendly reminder about the purpose of shared governance.

Issues with Funding to NIA (Non-Instructional Assignment) Program · Senator Poliala Dickson

Senator Dickson mentioned that she does not have anything else to add. The committee is happy that NIA is coming back.

Research Funding Report · Senators Chilton, McMillian, Phambu

They met as a committee and emailed Research and Sponsored Programs (RSP) asking them to answer questions prior to the due date of October 10. The committee has sent RSP a copy and is waiting for updates/clarification from RSP about future planning for research and moving to R1 classification. The committee will have more information to present during the next faculty senate meeting.

Other Concerns and Adjournment · Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senate Chair

Senator Tiriveedhi's mentioned that it is our responsibility as senators to take information discussed during the faculty senate meetings and convey to colleagues during department meetings, college meetings, etc. We should give 5-10 mins for senators to speak in the department meetings.

Senator Chilton stated that at UNC Chapel Hill and also recently in Texas, faculty members were recorded, leading to job losses. We should encourage your colleagues to be aware that the environment is much different than it used to be.

The next Faculty Senate meeting will be held on October 16, 2025.

Meeting adjourned at 3:20 PM.

Minutes recorded by Senator Sujata Guha, Secretary