

Tennessee State University
Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes
October 16, 2025

Present: AVP Erik Schmeller, Trustee Artenzia Young-Seigler, Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senator Reginald Archer, Senator Ahmed Aziz, Senator Carlos Beane, Dr. Laura Carpenter, Senator Kenneth Chilton, Senator Poliala Dickson, Senator Cynthia Gadsden, Senator Cynthia George, Dr. Jemal Gishe, Senator Sujata Guha, Senator Retta Guy, Dr. Sarah Martinez-Sepanski, Senator Mohammad Habibi, Dr. Kamrul Hasan, Dr. Cheong Kim, Senator Reynard McMillian, Dr. John Miglietta, Dr. Michael Montgomery, Senator Megan O'Neil, Dr. Angela Paez, Dr. Wanda Payne, Senator Nsoki Phambu, Dr. Frank Pleban, Senator Sean Posey, Senator Ljerka Rasmussen, Senator Brian Russell, Senator Miranda Sanford-Terry, Senator James Scholz, Senator Hongwei Si, Senator Jeffrey Siekpe, and Senator Janice Williams.

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. Senator Tiriveedhi announced that there will be a separate senate special session with Provost Melton to go over certain issues.

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

Provost Melton was attending the Dr. Levi Watkins, Jr. Institute, so AVP Schmeller filled in for her.

Provost Melton will address certain items later, such as SACSCOC, 5th year, missing attendance, missing grades, etc. AVP Schmeller said that if we have any questions for Provost Melton, he will take to her.

Senator Phambu, the Chair of the Research Committee, wants to add issues related to research in Provost Melton's list. Senator Phambu came back from the Thurgood Marshall College Fund meeting in Washington, DC at the beginning of October. The meeting was about building research capacity for R1 success. He asked the position of the new administration in terms of

whether the university is moving to R1. AVP Schemeller stated that given the financial situation right now, we may be trying to hold on to the current R2 position; but he will ask Provost Melton.

Senator Chilton mentioned that there are several dead links on the TSU website and asked if anything is being done to standardize our digital footprint and make us more professional. AVP Schmeller stated that conversations are going on, and we need to have our pages updated. Some of that may fall under VP Jerome Oglesby, but AVP Schmeller will inform Provost Melton about this concern.

Senator George was wondering about Homecoming – if Blexit was an authorized vendor to come on campus on October 17. AVP Schmeller mentioned that there is heightened security on campus. Senator George also stated that the students feel that they are being overpoliced and asked if this message can be communicated to Metro PD in terms of our students.

Senator Chilton mentioned that the ten and promotion cycle, having been suspended for those going up this year, has created ripples. He was wondering if there would be any type of information session to enlighten the rest of the faculty, AVP Schmeller said that he would pass that question on to Provost Melton as well. Senator Tiriveedhi asked all senators to directly send him any comments and concerns from their units. He stated that, before the next meeting, he would send the comments to AVP Schmeller and Provost Melton.

Approval of September 18, 2025 Meeting Minutes · Senator Sujata Guha, Senate Secretary

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the September 18 meeting, and it was approved.

Faculty Trustee Report · Trustee Artenzia Young-Seigler

The Board of Trustees met on September 18 and 19. There were three committee meetings on the 18th and a general meeting on the 19th.

The Audit Committee met in the morning and talked about state of report of external audit items and reviewed external audit issues and a plan moving forward. They will have audit items in their next audit, since they could not rectify issues from the past. It will take a little bit more time to clear up the previous audit findings. The internal auditor does not have enough manpower, so they are looking to hire additional staff. The process has been long. Dr. McMillian asked which issues needed to be rectified. Trustee Young-Seigler mentioned that there is not enough manpower to address some of the issues. There are issues that the Audit Committee continues to have since there are not enough people to address the audit findings.

The Student and Academic Affairs Committee approved tenure and promotion recommendations from 2024-2025. There was also approval of the post-performance review policy, officially known as PTR policy. We have more housing now than we have students. We need to increase

our enrollment. There are some issues with housing that need to be addressed. There is graduate student housing for graduate students who really need housing and can't find it anywhere else – it is on a request basis. Also, our new VP of Enrollment Management, Eric Stokes, put forward a new policy to modify the admission testing scores for ACT.

The Finance Committee talked about budget, enrollment, and reconciliation of our banking policy. Right now, the State thinks that we are taking 45 days to reconcile our banking statement – but our policy says 30 days. So, we need to update our policy to specify 30 days, which is what the State expects. The university is actively seeking a new CFO. Mr. Bradley White, Interim VP of Business and Finance, will report to the new CFO.

We are due for a new master plan – the current one expires in 2025. The next Board meetings will be on November 20th and 21st. Those will be the last meetings of this semester.

Senator McMillian asked what the expenses were for the rest of the Fall 2025 semester or the academic year, whether there was a shortfall, and what would be the plan to correct it. Trustee Young-Seigler took notes for President Tucker to address.

Faculty Handbook Update · Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senate Chair

Senator Tiriveedhi shared his screen on the faculty senate handbook. The handbook has been mostly updated for 2025, but a few things will need to be added. The Office of Academic Affairs has a committee working on revamping the Academic Affairs manual, and Senator Tiriveedhi is waiting for the Academic Affairs operating manual to work with the faculty handbook. Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that there will be an ad hoc committee formed very soon, possibly in the Spring.

AVP Schmeller is working on updating academic policies but is not aware of major changes in the operating manual. Once the policies are uploaded, they will be shared with the faculty senate. After that they will move to procedures.

Committee Reports · Senate Committee Chairs

IT Committee (Senator Phambu) – the committee had its first meeting on September 19. The faculty have very old university laptops on which myTSU and eLearn are not synchronized. For their next meeting on October 31, the committee has invited the CIO for an update. Senator Phambu will then report to the faculty senate.

Academic Committee (Senator Ghosh) – there was no report since Senator Ghosh was on travel.

Budget Committee (Senator McMillian) – the committee members are trying to obtain an explanation from the CFO about the university's financial standing. They are awaiting a response from the university.

Alumni Relations and Development Committee (Senator McMillian) – Senator McMillian has previous work experience with the Foundation Chair. He will put a committee together before

meeting with the Foundation Chair. The committee should figure out an outreach program for alumni to work out a giving percentage (8 or 9% to mid or upper 20s).

Constitution and Bylaws Committee (Senator O'Neil) – the committee met on Friday, October 10, and is still working on faculty workloads, faculty handbook, and faculty operating manual. There are concerns about proper research, teaching, and service from colleges, but those policies are not readily available. The committee's next meeting will be on November 7. Senator O'Neil will provide an update in the next faculty senate meeting.

Faculty Grievance Committee (Senator Sanford-Terry) – the committee has reviewed the faculty handbook language to clarify the process. They will be voting on that in their next meeting. They are still looking at the Extra Service Pay (ESP) policy and have requested data. Once the committee receives the data, they will go through it and provide an update. The committee has also received access to Qualtrics and will provide an update about that too.

Curriculum Committee (Senator Sanford-Terry) – the committee met on Monday, October 13, but guest speakers did not show up to address the queriers. Senator Sanford-Terry will reach out to the guest speakers again. The committee members are working to approve other proposals. Any proposals submitted at the end of previous month will be reviewed by the 10th of the following month.

Faculty Benefits Committee (Senator Dickson) – the committee met on October 7, and 9 committee members attended. They are working on getting detailed policy from HR on paid family leave. TSU's policy does not offer flexibility like other institutions do. The committee is working with HR to update policy on their website. The committee members posed several questions on NIA that Senator Dickson took to AVP Schmeller. The Office of Academic Affairs wants to support faculty who get Fulbright, but for now it will be the NIA in Spring 2026. If someone gets a Fulbright, Academic Affairs will work with the faculty and the department. A question was asked as to why the one year and ½ pay is not an option. AVP Schmeller replied that it is purely due to cost. Senator Dickson asked if it is possible to access data on a cost breakdown for the NIA data. Cost of living rises is also a concern. What are enrollment targets and achievement methods? What will be done with state allocated funds? Is there a specific formula to address cost of living adjustments? AVP Schemeller answered that it is President Tucker's call on the cost of living.

Senator Williams mentioned that her department has wondered why the time was so long (7 years) between applying for a new NIA after initially receiving it. AVP Schmeller answered that a sabbatical typically runs for 7 years, and to spread out the opportunity as much as possible. Dr. Miglietta agreed but did not have the previous meeting minutes in front of him. Trustee Young-Seigler stated that manpower was also a concern.

Nominations and Appointment Committee (Senator Ghosh) – there was no report since Senator Ghosh was on travel.

Library Committee (Senator Scholz) – the committee will meet on Wednesday, October 22. That will be their first meeting. Senator Scholz will introduce himself and talk about what each department would like from the library in terms of services/resources. All committee members will also share any possible collaboration opportunities between the departments and the library.

Professional Development Committee (Senator Chilton) – the committee was supposed to meet on October 17, but they will change that scheduled meeting to Friday, October 24, due to Homecoming. The committee will focus on figuring out types of development opportunities the university can provide faculty members who are low performing on the new PTR policy.

Research Committee (Senator Phambu) – the committee had a meeting on September 12. Several faculty members are willing to do research and write grants. The question is whether we are going from R2 to R1 or not. Perhaps we should just strengthen the R2. Dr. Phambu mentioned that, typically, administrators at HBCUs do not apply for grants, but they should. If we drop research at TSU, we will miss the money apportioned to TSU. Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that the Research Committee will come out with more details on funds and agencies.

Student Appeals Committee (Senator Russell) – there was no report. The committee will meet again.

Post Tenure Review (PTR) Committee (Senator Chilton) – one member asked what will happen if the state mandates PTR? The PTR efforts are appreciated by the university.

Ad hoc Non-Instructional Assignment (NIA) Committee (Senator Posey) – the committee is still waiting to be clear on what is happening with the NIA. After that they will meet and provide an update.

Ad hoc Fair Funding Committee (Senator McMillian) – the committee did not have a meeting yet. Once Senator McMillian meets with the President or CFO, the committee will figure out what actions the faculty will need to take.

Research Funding Report · Senators Kenneth Chilton, Reynard McMillian, and Nsoki Phambu

The Research Committee sent a report to the RSP office and asked for reply on Friday, October 10. However, they got no response. They met as a committee again on Monday, October 13, and decided to send another email. This time they got a reply, but it did not address any questions on the report. So, the committee sent another email to RSP. They will wait till October 31 to get answers to their questions. Senator Tiriveedhi stated that, in the spirit of shared governance, the Research Committee needs a proper response.

Senator Dickson asked Senator Tiriveedhi if he reported the cost-of-living expenses when he met with the President last time. Senator Tiriveedhi mentioned that he will have a full report in the next meeting, along with Senator Stanberry.

The President was not in favor of any across-the-board salary hikes this year. This year we were in \$39 million debt, and next year it will be \$14 million. The university is trying to implement several cost-cutting measures.

Other Concerns and Adjournment · Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senate Chair

Senator Rasmussen asked when the final version of the Post Tenure Review Policy will be approved for distribution in our unit. Senator Tiriveedhi responded that it can be done once he sends a clean version to all senators.

Senator Williams expressed concern about the way the university deals with guests that come to the university to handle students. The faculty must list any speaker who comes to their classes, and that has to get approval from the Dean's office. There is a whole red tape procedure to follow. The general concern is that it creates a very lengthy process and hinders our students from getting state-of-the-art information from vendors about innovative processes. Senator Tiriveedhi asked if we can give this task to the Academic Committee. He asked Dr. Williams to work with the Academic Committee Chair and update the Senate in the next meeting. Dr. Phambu stated that parking permits are also a problem, since they are \$5 per visitor. Senator Tiriveedhi will have a detailed report on those issues next time.

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

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 PM.

Minutes recorded by Senator Sujata Guha, Secretary