



THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION, RESEARCH, AND SERVICE COMMITTEE February 27, 2025

The Education, Research, and Service Committee of The University of Tennessee Board of Trustees met at 1:30 p.m. (CST) on Thursday, February 27, 2025. The meeting was held in the Russell Duncan Ballroom of the Boling University Center located at the University of Tennessee at Martin in Martin, Tennessee.

Committee Members Present: Jamie R. Woodson, Committee Chair; John C. Compton, Board Chair; Elizabeth K. Crawford (Faculty Representative); Charles Hatcher, Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Agriculture; Lisa N. Patel (Student Representative); and Donald J. Smith.

Other in Attendance:

Trustees: Bradford D. Box, Decosta E. Jenkins; William (Bill) C. Rhodes III; and David N. Watson.

University Administration: President Randy Boyd; Bernard Savarese, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Research, and Student Success; Cynthia C. Moore, Board Secretary and Special Counsel; Chancellor Peter Buckley (UT Health Science Center); Interim Chancellor Robert Dooley (UT Chattanooga); Chancellor Yancy E. Freeman (UT Martin); Chancellor Linda C. Martin (UT Southern); and Chancellor Donde Plowman (UT Knoxville). In addition, other members of the UT senior leadership and administrative staff were present.

Ms. Moore announced the presence of a quorum. The meeting was webcast for the convenience of the University community, the general public, and the media.

Opening Remarks of the Committee Chair

Committee Chair Jamie Woodson called the meeting to order, expressing gratitude to the UT Martin campus for their hospitality.

Board Policy on Artificial Intelligence

Dr. Matt Matthews, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, provided an overview of the proposed artificial intelligence (AI) policy for the UT System. The policy was developed in response to recent legislative requirements and aims to establish guiding principles for faculty, staff, and students regarding AI usage in instructional and academic assignments.

Dr. Matthews explained that AI technology, such as ChatGPT, has introduced new challenges and ambiguities in education, prompting the need for clear policies. He detailed the statutory definition of AI as outlined in federal regulations and state law. The proposed policy sets forth principles that balance the benefits of AI while maintaining academic integrity and

compliance with legal standards. Faculty will retain the discretion to determine AI's role in coursework, and campuses will be required to communicate these policies to students. Violations of AI usage guidelines will be handled under existing academic integrity policies.

Committee members engaged in discussion. Student Trustee Lisa Patel raised concerns about the reliability of AI detection tools. Dr. Matthews responded that AI detection tools should not be the sole determinant of academic misconduct and emphasized the role of faculty judgment. Trustee Charlie Hatcher inquired about the potential for unforeseen complications and whether the University was prepared to adapt its policies. Dr. Matthews indicated that the policy framework allows for adjustments as AI technology evolves.

Student Trustee Lisa Patel noted that many professors already include AI usage guidelines in their syllabi, and the policy would provide consistency across campuses. Dr. Beth Crawford, faculty representative to the Committee, highlighted the challenges of AI "hallucinations," where AI-generated citations and sources may be fabricated, underscoring the importance of faculty oversight.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee approved a recommendation that the Board of Trustees adopt the Resolution approving the Board Policy on Institutional Accreditation, as presented in Tab 1 of the meeting materials.

Consent Agenda

Committee Chair Woodson asked if there were any requests to remove an item from the agenda. There being none, upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee approved: (i) the Resolution to adopt the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee; and (ii) the Resolutions pertaining to the other action items included on the Consent Agenda (a complete list of the approved items appears at the end of these minutes).

Presentations

Enrollment Update. Dr. Bernie Savarese, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Research, and Student Success, presented a comprehensive analysis of graduate trends and their implications for the UT System. He began by outlining national high school graduation patterns, noting that 38 states are projected to experience a decline in high school graduates by 2041. States such as California and New York are expected to see dramatic drops of nearly 30% in high school graduates, leading to intensified competition for a shrinking college-bound population. However, Tennessee is an outlier, with forecasts indicating a 15% increase in high school graduates, making it one of only five states anticipating substantial growth in its student pipeline. This shift presents both opportunities and challenges, as out-of-state institutions increasingly target Tennessee students for recruitment.

The presentation included insights into Tennessee's college-going rate, which has shown signs of recovery after several years of decline. From 2021 to 2023, the number of high school graduates enrolling in college increased by 2.4%, reversing prior downward trends. Notably, 78% of Tennessee's college-going students submitted applications to at least one UT campus,

underscoring the University's strong appeal within the state. However, Dr. Savarese cautioned that maintaining and growing the University's market share will require proactive outreach, particularly to underrepresented and first-generation students. Committee members expressed interest in how the University can further leverage Tennessee's population growth to enhance recruitment efforts and ensure that more of these graduates choose a UT campus over competing institutions.

Dr. Savarese then transitioned to a campus-specific review of admit, yield, and retention rates, offering a detailed breakdown for each predominantly undergraduate campus.

- At UT Knoxville, applications for first-year students increased by 135% over the past five years, reflecting a sharp rise in demand. However, due to capacity constraints, the admit rate has steadily declined, falling to 36.5% overall, with in-state admissions down by 10% and out-of-state admit rates dropping by 43.3%. Despite this, the yield rate—the percentage of admitted students who enroll—has remained stable, slightly above the national average for public institutions. UT Knoxville achieved a record-breaking in-state freshman enrollment of 4,348 students, reflecting strong demand among Tennessee residents. Committee members inquired about the effects of early admission policies and guaranteed admission programs, with campus leadership noting that adjustments made in the past year are expected to enhance predictability in enrollment projections moving forward.
- At UT Chattanooga, total freshman applications have grown by 38% since 2021, resulting in record-breaking application numbers for both in-state and out-of-state students. The admit rate has remained relatively stable, hovering around 80%, which reflects the campus' commitment to accessibility while maintaining academic standards. However, UT Chattanooga has experienced challenges in converting admitted students into enrolled students, as its yield rate has declined from 35% to 23% for out-of-state applicants, primarily due to housing capacity constraints. Interim Chancellor Robert Dooley acknowledged that increasing housing availability and student engagement efforts are critical to improving yield and retention moving forward. Retention rates at UT Chattanooga have declined by 4.8% over the past five years, prompting the establishment of new faculty-led retention initiatives and the introduction of short-term intervention strategies, such as retention grants and enhanced academic advising.
- At UT Southern, applications have surged by 87% since 2021, with out-of-state applications rising by 260%—a testament to the campus' expanded recruitment efforts and its newfound presence on the Common Application. The admit rate has slightly declined, reflecting greater selectivity, while yield rates have normalized after an initial post-merger spike in 2021. First-year retention rates have climbed dramatically, increasing from 54.6% to 77.2% over five years, a 20% improvement driven by enhanced student support services and faculty engagement. Committee members praised these gains and encouraged continued investment in mentorship programs and first-year experience initiatives.

- At UT Martin, applications have undergone a strategic transformation, with the campus shifting from an external recruitment service to an in-house enrollment management approach. While applications initially declined due to this transition, yield rates have steadily increased, climbing by 3.7% over five years. The admit rate has increased slightly, reflecting efforts to expand access while maintaining academic rigor. Fall-to-Spring retention at UT Martin reached a record 92%, serving as a strong indicator of improved student success outcomes. Chancellor Freeman highlighted efforts to further strengthen academic advising and financial aid support, ensuring that retention continues to improve.

Committee members engaged in a robust discussion on how these trends should shape the University's long-term enrollment and retention strategies. Committee members stressed that while the UT System is experiencing strong demand and enrollment growth, retention and student success must remain a priority. It was noted that continued investments in student support, financial aid, and housing infrastructure will be necessary for the University to meet the goal of enrolling 71,000 students by 2030.

Fall 2024 Student Experience Survey Results. Dr. Savarese presented the findings from the 2024 Student Experience Survey, which marked the seventh administration of this systemwide assessment. The survey, originally launched in Fall 2020, was designed to gauge student satisfaction, engagement, and campus climate. It includes demographic questions, five scaled-response items, and open-ended comment sections, providing a broad perspective on student perceptions across UT campuses.

The 2024 administration saw a record response rate, with over 8,500 students participating, surpassing the previous high recorded in Fall 2023. The increase in engagement was attributed to strong outreach efforts by student affairs leaders across campuses. The results showed consistent and significant improvements in key student experience measures over time.

Key Findings:

- Overall student satisfaction increased, with scores improving across all major survey categories;
- The percentage of students who "agree" or "strongly agree" that their campus provides a supportive environment increased significantly from 2020 to 2024;
- The statement "I would recommend my campus to a family member or friend" received its highest rating to date, reaching 4.23 on a 5-point scale, up from 3.28 in 2020; and
- The number of students who "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with positive campus experience statements dropped to single digits, highlighting substantial gains in student satisfaction.

Dr. Savarese then presented a campus-by-campus breakdown, showing that all UT campuses improved in nearly every survey category, with UT Chattanooga, UT Southern, and the UT Health Science Center seeing particularly strong improvements.

The Committee members praised the positive trends in student satisfaction while recognizing areas for continued improvement, particularly in support services, financial aid accessibility, and campus infrastructure. In response to questions from the Trustees, Dr. Savarese and other members of the University's leadership team noted that additional investments in counseling and wellness programs are underway. It was recommended that the Administration consider supplementing the current survey with a more detailed national benchmarking survey.

Gallup Climate Survey. Dr. Savarese then provided a preview of the 2025 Gallup Climate Survey. Pursuant to state law, public higher education institutions must conduct a biennial assessment of campus climate regarding diversity of thought and free expression. The Gallup Climate Survey, first administered in 2023, is designed to assess how comfortable students and employees feel expressing their views on campus, whether they believe the university supports a diversity of perspectives, and how they perceive the overall climate for discussion and debate. The 2023 results showed that a majority of students and employees felt the University provided an open environment for expression.

The 2025 administration concluded on February 24. Dr. Savarese noted that participation in the 2025 survey increased compared to 2023, suggesting that students and employees are more engaged in these discussions. Dr. Savarese confirmed that the survey will analyze results in the context of national higher education free speech studies. The full report on the 2025 Gallup Climate Survey will be shared with the Trustees.

COACHE Faculty Satisfaction Survey. Dr. Matthews then presented a summary of the COACHE Faculty Satisfaction Survey, which assesses faculty perceptions of workload, governance, compensation, research support, and institutional leadership. The most recent COACHE survey (2021) revealed that University faculty rated their work experience higher than faculty at peer institutions across nearly all major categories.

Key Findings from Survey:

- Faculty rated their experience with teaching, research, and service above national averages, with teaching receiving the highest satisfaction scores;
- Senior leadership, facilities and resources, and health/retirement benefits were highly rated; and
- Challenges were noted in interdisciplinary collaboration, adaptability, and governance transparency.

Dr. Matthews emphasized that while the 2021 results were largely positive, the 2024 administration (currently in progress) will provide fresh insights into how faculty perceptions have evolved. The new survey launched on February 20, 2025, and will remain open until early April. Results are expected to be available by August, with a formal presentation at the October Board meeting. In response to prior Committee feedback, the UT System is also developing a shorter "pulse survey" to be administered between COACHE cycles to capture more frequent faculty feedback.

The Committee members expressed appreciation for the positive trajectory in faculty satisfaction while acknowledging the importance of addressing areas needing improvement, particularly in interdisciplinary research and faculty workload balance. Additionally, the Trustees recognized the significant progress made in assessing student satisfaction, faculty and staff engagement.

Research Update. Dr. Kari Babski-Reeves, Associate Vice President for Research, provided a comprehensive update on research productivity, performance metrics, and strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing the University's research and creative endeavors. She emphasized that while traditional research metrics, such as expenditures and grant funding, are critical benchmarks, they only capture a fraction of the true research and scholarly impact of the University's faculty. To better evaluate and support research efforts, Dr. Babski-Reeves outlined a broader framework that includes multidisciplinary collaborations, industry partnerships, technology commercialization, and creative works.

Dr. Babski-Reeves began her presentation by highlighting record-setting levels of research activity across the UT System. In fiscal year 2024, faculty researchers submitted over 2,900 grant proposals, collectively requesting nearly \$2 billion in external funding. Total research expenditures for the UT System reached \$484 million, reflecting strong growth in federally funded projects, state-supported initiatives, and private-sector collaborations. Faculty members secured grants from nearly 1,000 unique sponsors. Among these, 226 unique industry partners funded research projects across various disciplines, demonstrating University's growing reputation as a hub for applied research and innovation. She noted that a significant portion of the \$2 billion in requested funding came from multi-investigator proposals, highlighting the increasing importance of cross-campus and cross-disciplinary partnerships. These collaborations include joint research among UT campuses, as well as external partnerships including the Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

Dr. Babski-Reeves also underscored the importance of research beyond traditional STEM¹ disciplines, stating that the University's research mission extends beyond laboratories and scientific publications. She highlighted the impact of faculty research in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. To better capture these contributions, the University is exploring new mechanisms for tracking creative output, such as published books, artistic performances, digital media projects, and community-driven research initiatives. Dr. Babski-Reeves also addressed the need for improved research infrastructure and faculty support, emphasizing that continued investment in research facilities, high-performance computing, and lab resources is essential for maintaining the University's competitive edge.

In response to questions from members of the Committee, Dr. Babski-Reeves responded that the University is focused on: (i) expanding its corporate engagement strategy; (ii) streamlining the research contracting process; (iii) launching industry-focused research centers to attract private-sector investment; and (iv) increasing student involvement in faculty research. Dr. Babski-Reeves also acknowledged that AI is becoming an essential tool

¹ Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

for data analysis, predictive modeling, and automation, and the University is working to equip faculty with the necessary training and resources to integrate AI into their research programs.

Other Business and Adjournment

With no further business to come before the Committee, Committee Chair Woodson adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,

/s/ Cynthia C. Moore
Cynthia C. Moore
Secretary and Special Counsel

Approved Consent Agenda Items

- Minutes of the Prior Meeting (October 24, 2024)
- New Academic Programs
 - Master of Science – Social Work, UT Martin
 - Bachelor of Science – Communication and Information, UT Knoxville
 - Master of Science – Retail, Hospitality and Tourism Management, UT Knoxville
 - Master of Science – Sustainability, UT Knoxville
- Academic Program Modifications
 - Bachelor of Science – Environmental Studies, UT Knoxville
 - Bachelor of Science – Recreation and Sport Management, UT Knoxville
- New Academic Units, UT Chattanooga
 - Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Geography
 - Department of Criminal Justice
- New Off-campus Centers, UT Knoxville
- Grant of Tenure upon Initial Appointment

Information Items

- Report on Periodic, Enhanced, and Annual Post-Tenure Performance Review
- Transfer Report
- Certification of Degrees Conferred