



# THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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## MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION, RESEARCH, AND SERVICE COMMITTEE February 26, 2026

The Education, Research, and Service Committee of The University of Tennessee Board of Trustees met at 12:30 p.m. (CST) on Thursday, February 26, 2026. The meeting was held in the Mooney Library at the UT Health Science Center in Memphis, Tennessee.

Committee Members Present: Jamie R. Woodson (Committee Chair); John C. Compton (Board Chair); Hon. William E. Haslam; Ashlee C. Mallon (Student Trustee); Shanea A. McKinney; Donald J. Smith; and Kenneth W. Vickers (Faculty Representative).

Other Trustees Present: Bradford D. Box; Decosta E. Jenkins; William C. (Bill) Rhodes III; J. David Wade; David N. Watson; and T. Lang Wiseman.

University Administration: President Randy Boyd; Linda C. Martin, Executive Vice President; Cynthia C. Moore, Board Secretary and Special Counsel; Chancellor Melinda Arnold (UT Southern); Chancellor Lori Mann Bruce (UT Chattanooga); Chancellor Peter Buckley (UT Health Science Center); Chancellor Yancy Freeman (UT Martin); and Chancellor Donde Plowman (UT Knoxville). Additional members of the UT senior leadership and staff were also in attendance.

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.

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### **Opening Remarks of the Committee Chair**

Committee Chair Jamie Woodson called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance. She expressed appreciation to Chancellor Peter Buckley and the faculty and staff of the University of Tennessee Health Science Center for their hospitality and for the thoughtful planning and preparation associated with hosting the Board's winter meeting in Memphis.

### **Requests to Address the Board**

There were no requests to address the Committee.

### **Consent Agenda**

The Committee considered the Consent Agenda, which included: (i) approval of the minutes of the previous meeting of the Education, Research, and Service Committee; and (ii) approval of the Grant of Tenure upon Initial Appointment. Chair Woodson asked whether any

Committee member wished to remove an item from the Consent Agenda for separate consideration. There being no requests, and upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee approved the Consent Agenda as presented.

### **Revised Student Code of Conduct, UTM**

Dr. Andy Lewter, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, presented proposed revisions to the University of Tennessee at Martin Student Code of Conduct. He explained that the revisions are intended to modernize and clarify the document, improve organization and readability, and ensure continued alignment with current federal regulations and University practices while maintaining the existing standards of student conduct.

The proposed revisions include updated terminology and definitions, clarification of disciplinary procedures and appeals processes, additional due process protections, expanded medical amnesty provisions designed to encourage students to seek emergency assistance, and revisions intended to improve consistency with student conduct processes across the UT System. Dr. Lewter noted that the revisions are primarily organizational and procedural in nature and do not substantially alter the standards expected of students.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee approved a recommendation that the Board of Trustees adopt the Resolution approving the revised Student Code of Conduct for the University of Tennessee at Martin.

### **New Academic Programs**

#### Bachelor of Science in Bioinformatics, UTK.

Dr. John Zomchick, Provost and Vice Chancellor, presented a proposal to establish a Bachelor of Science in Bioinformatics at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He described the proposed degree as Tennessee's first undergraduate program in the field, combining biological sciences, computer science, and data analytics to address workforce needs in agriculture, environmental science, biotechnology, and related sectors. The curriculum includes experiential learning opportunities designed to prepare graduates for immediate employment or graduate study while advancing the University's land-grant mission through applied research and workforce development.

The Committee discussed projected enrollment for the program, including whether the estimates reflected new student growth or migration from existing academic programs. Provost Zomchick explained that the projections include both current UT students pursuing related fields and new freshmen and transfer students expected to be attracted by the program's interdisciplinary focus. He further noted that implementation costs are expected to be minimal because the program will leverage existing faculty expertise and academic resources.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Committee approved a recommendation that the Board of Trustees adopt the Resolution establishing the Bachelor of Science in Bioinformatics at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

### Master of Science in Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management, UTK

Provost Zomchick provided an update on the proposed Master of Science in Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management, which the Board had previously approved and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission ("THEC") subsequently reviewed. He explained that THEC requested additional information regarding workforce demand for program graduates and the anticipated return on investment for students completing the degree.

UTK intends to supplement its original submission with additional employer support and labor market information demonstrating continued demand for advanced analytical and leadership skills in the hospitality and tourism industries. Provost Zomchick noted that the curriculum, delivery model, and financial structure remain unchanged and that the Administration intends to return the proposal to THEC with the additional supporting information.

Chair Woodson expressed appreciation for the University's responsiveness to THEC's questions and noted that careful evaluation of workforce demand and student return on investment is an important part of the academic program approval process. President Boyd emphasized the importance of tourism and hospitality to Tennessee's economy and the need to develop a strong pipeline of qualified professionals to support continued economic growth across the state. Because the item was presented as an update and involved no changes to the academic program previously reviewed by the Committee and approved by the Board, no Committee action was required.

## **Presentations**

### Enrollment Reporting

***High School Graduate Trends.*** Dr. Matt Matthews, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, presented an overview of recent high school graduate trends and the implications for undergraduate enrollment across the UT System. The presentation examined statewide high school graduation rates, college-going behavior, and the University's share of Tennessee students pursuing postsecondary education, providing context for the UT System's long-term enrollment strategy.

Dr. Matthews reported that the number of Tennessee high school graduates and the percentage of those students enrolling in college have largely recovered from the declines experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and are approaching pre-pandemic levels. He noted that the UT System has continued to strengthen its position within the state's higher education market,

with approximately one out of every six Tennessee students attending college now choosing a UT institution.

Committee members engaged in extensive discussion regarding the relationship between demographic trends and future enrollment growth. It was observed that while Tennessee continues to experience modest growth in the number of high school graduates, overall college-going rates remain relatively flat, suggesting that recent enrollment gains by the University have resulted primarily from increased market share rather than expansion of the overall student population. Dr. Matthews agreed that the University's recent success reflects its ability to attract a larger proportion of Tennessee students and emphasized the importance of sustaining that momentum through continued outreach and recruitment efforts.

The Committee also discussed demographic patterns reflected in the statewide data, including declining participation by male students in higher education. Trustees noted that increasing overall college participation represents an important opportunity for the University to advance its statewide mission and help meet Tennessee's long-term workforce needs. The discussion emphasized that continued enrollment growth will depend not only on attracting additional students but also on encouraging more Tennesseans to pursue and complete postsecondary education.

***Campus Admit, Yield, and Retention Rate Trends.*** Dr. Matthews presented admissions, enrollment yield, and first-year retention data for the University's primarily undergraduate campuses. He reviewed trends in applications, admission rates, yield rates, and retention, noting continued growth in student interest across the UT System and increasing selectivity at several campuses, particularly the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

The Committee discussed the methodology used to report admissions statistics, including the distinction between total applications and "decisional applications," which include completed files containing all materials needed for an admissions decision. Dr. Matthews explained that the revised methodology aligns with national IPEDS<sup>1</sup> reporting standards and will provide greater consistency in future enrollment reports.

The Committee devoted substantial discussion to student retention trends across the campuses. Members commended the continued improvement in first-year retention rates and recognized the progress achieved through investments in student success initiatives and campus support services. They also noted opportunities to strengthen persistence beyond the first year and encouraged future reports to include second-, third-, and fourth-year retention data, along with graduation outcomes, to provide a more complete view of student success.

Committee members agreed that continued progress in retention and graduation will require sustained attention to advising, student engagement, financial support, and academic success

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<sup>1</sup> *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.*

initiatives. The discussion underscored that enrollment growth remains important, but long-term institutional success also depends on helping students persist, complete their degrees, and graduate in a timely manner. University leadership indicated that additional longitudinal retention data will be incorporated into future Board reports.

### Fall 2025 Student Experience Survey Results

Dr. Leigh Morales, Director of Student Success for the UT System, presented the results of the Fall 2025 Student Experience Survey. Now in its eighth administration, the systemwide survey was established at the Board's request to monitor student perceptions of their educational experience across the UT System. Administered annually through a consistent instrument across all campuses, the survey provides a longitudinal measure of student engagement and satisfaction and complements more comprehensive campus-level assessments.

The 2025 survey produced the highest participation rate since the instrument's inception, with more than 20,700 students – approximately one-third of the University's student population – submitting responses. Dr. Morales noted that the increased participation strengthens the reliability of the data, while the demographic composition of respondents remained consistent with the University's overall student population, allowing for meaningful year-over-year comparisons.

The results demonstrated continued positive trends across each of the five core indicators measured since 2021. Agreement with statements related to campus experience, belonging, and overall satisfaction continued to improve, while negative responses declined to single-digit percentages across each measure. Dr. Morales observed that the consistent survey methodology provides confidence that these trends reflect meaningful improvement in the student experience.

Committee members expressed appreciation for the significant increase in student participation and the continued improvement reflected in the results. The discussion noted that the expanded response rate provides a stronger basis for evaluating student perceptions across the UT System. Members also suggested that future Board presentations include faculty survey results alongside student and staff findings to provide a more comprehensive view of institutional climate and engagement.

The Committee recognized the survey as an important management tool for monitoring student engagement, identifying areas for continued improvement, and informing campus-level initiatives designed to strengthen the overall student experience.

### Student Mental Health and Wellness

Dr. Jesse Gold, UT Chief Wellness Officer and Associate Professor of Psychiatry, presented an update on student mental health and wellness initiatives across the UT System. She emphasized the University's commitment to supporting student well-being as an essential

component of academic success, persistence, and degree completion. Dr. Gold also recognized campus counseling professionals, wellness staff, and student affairs leaders whose work provides direct support to students.

Dr. Gold reviewed national trends showing that rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation among college students have improved from the historic highs experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic but remain elevated compared to pre-pandemic levels. She noted that mental health challenges continue to be a significant barrier to student success and cited recent national Gallup research indicating that students considering leaving college are more likely to identify mental health concerns than financial considerations as the primary factor influencing that decision.

The presentation outlined the University's comprehensive approach to student wellness, which includes prevention, early intervention, coordinated behavioral health services, health promotion programming, peer support initiatives, and campus partnerships. Dr. Gold emphasized that mental health should be viewed not only as a clinical service but also as an integral part of student success, requiring collaboration among academic affairs, student affairs, counseling services, and campus leadership.

Committee members recognized the connection between student wellness and the University's retention and graduation goals and expressed appreciation for continued investment in mental health services across the UT System. The discussion underscored student well-being as an important strategic priority and emphasized the need for sustained attention to prevention, access to care, and early intervention to support student success over time.

### **Closing Remarks and Adjournment**

Committee, Chair Woodson thanked the presenters, Committee members, and University leadership for their thoughtful participation and the informative discussions regarding academic affairs and student success initiatives across the UT System.

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

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

### **Information Items**

- Report on Post Approval Monitoring of Academic Programs
- Certification of Degrees Conferred