



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

December 5, 2024

Roaden University Center, Room 282

MINUTES

Meeting streamed live via link found on this web page:

<https://www.tntech.edu/board/board-and-board-committee-meetings.php>

AGENDA ITEM I – CALL TO ORDER

The Tennessee Tech Board of Trustees met on Thursday, December 5, 2024, in Roaden University Center Room 282. Chair Trudy Harper called the meeting to order at 1:32 p.m.

Chair Harper asked Mr. Lee Wray, Secretary, to call the roll. The following members were present:

- Tom Jones
- Jeannette Luna
- Thomas Lynn
- Claire Myers
- Rhedona Rose
- Camron Rudd
- Johnny Stites
- Trudy Harper

- Fred Lowery – joined electronically

- Barry Wilmore - absent

A quorum was physically present. Tennessee Tech faculty, staff and members of the public were also in attendance.

Mr. Lowery confirmed that he could simultaneously hear and speak to the Board members, that he was by himself, and that he received the Board materials in advance of the meeting.

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AGENDA ITEM II – SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENTS

Chair Harper stated that there were two groups of students to recognize – two teams that won championships during Fall semester. The Tennessee Tech football team won a share of the Ohio Valley Conference (OVC) regular season championship for the first time since 2011 – the 11th conference title as a member of the OVC. The women's soccer team claimed the OVC regular season championship for the third straight time, capturing eight OVC post season honors – including the OVC Sportsmanship Award. Representatives from the soccer team included Maggie Conrad, Katie Toney, Meredith Nye and Coach Corey Boyd. The four football team captains included Tim Coutras, Dan Rickert, Aaron Swafford and Jordan Yates led by Coach Bobby Wilder.

AGENDA ITEM III – APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chair Harper asked for approval of the minutes of the September 26, 2024, Tennessee Tech Board of Trustees meeting. Chair Harper asked if there were questions or comments regarding the minutes. There being none, Mr. Stites moved to recommend approval of the September 26, 2024, Board of Trustees minutes. Mr. Jones seconded the motion. Mr. Wray called a roll call vote. The motion carried unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM VIII.A. - ACADEMIC & STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION – TTU POLICY 216 (STUDENT ACADEMIC INTEGRITY)

Chair Harper stated that agenda items would be reordered to accommodate availability of a participating individual.

Ms. Rose moved to adopt Policy 216 (Student Academic Integrity) and archive Policy 217 (Student Academic Misconduct.) Dr. Luna seconded the motion. Mr. Wray called a roll call vote. The motion carried 6-2, with Mr. Rudd and Mr. Stites opposed.

AGENDA ITEM IV – SUNSET HEARING REPORT

On behalf of the Executive Committee, Chair Harper reported that when a new agency or Board is formed in the State of Tennessee, the Board is scheduled for a Sunset review process at some point after the formation and then again in subsequent years following the original review. The process is to review the Board's performance and whether the Board should continue its existence. Tennessee Tech's Board had the first Sunset hearing about four years ago and at that time, our Board was given a four-year extension. On October 14, 2024, Chair Harper and President Oldham presented to a Joint Committee of the House and Senate. The review went

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remarkably well, and the Committee has recommended to the full Legislature that Tennessee Tech's Board of Trustees be awarded an additional five-year extension.

AGENDA ITEM V – STUDENT TRUSTEE REPORT

Ms. Myers reported that the Fall semester has been full of excitement and growth for Tennessee Tech students, faculty, and staff.

The grand opening of the Ashraf Islam Engineering Building, the first new engineering building on campus in the past 50 years, brought students, faculty and staff, alumni, and government officials together to celebrate the addition of a new state-of-the-art hub for engineering students.

The Student Government Association brought an outstanding delegation to the Tennessee Intercollegiate State Legislature (TISL) this year.

Tech students and faculty celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month this past September and October.

Our campus also recognized Native American Heritage Month during November with events hosted by Intercultural Affairs, the History Department, and Center Stage.

Also, in November, veterans were recognized throughout a week of events and celebrations, including the annual Veteran's Day ceremony and a veteran's town hall focused on informing attendees of VA benefits and connecting them to various resources in the community.

Homecoming Week was a highlight for many students and boasted a variety of friendly competitions and events. The festivities ended on a high note with a 52-10 victory over Lindenwood University in the Homecoming Football game.

Following Thanksgiving break, students are finalizing their projects and papers and preparing for finals. Various departments and clubs throughout the university are hosting de-stressors and study sessions for students.

On November 2, Tennessee Tech lost a junior conservation biology major, Ethan Haynes. His loss was felt by many. In the wake of this tragedy, we have a charge to take this sadness and loss and find a way to use it for good -- to reach out and check up on our friends, to start hard conversations about mental health, to come together and support each other as a student body.

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AGENDA ITEM VI – PRESIDENT’S REPORT

President Oldham mentioned the importance of investment. As an academic institution, we look at the Return on Investment (ROI). There are three potential outcomes of investments: 1) Good investments pay off 2) Bad investments lose resources 3) Choosing to make no investment guarantees a declining return.

It is also important to define what we are trying to achieve: 1) Grow enrollment 2) Continue to improve our academic reputation 3) Achieve student success 4) Meet the growing talent demand in Tennessee 5) Improve economic impact for our communities 6) Continue to develop stronger communities which we serve.

Where are we making investments? 1) Financial stability is where it begins because we cannot invest what we don’t have. The Composite Financial Index (CFI) is important to assess how we are doing.

Where are we making these investments? First, we are investing in our faculty and staff, as this Board has been heavily involved in the compensation study and the compensation plan which emerged from the study.

However, monetary investment is not all we are doing for faculty and staff. We also provide career development and advancement opportunities.

Of course, we are investing in students. One of the most notable ways is through scholarships. That has been done strategically and with much intentionality.

We are also investing in students in a variety of other ways, including through advising, counseling services and through student activities and organizations, which have been noted throughout the day. Certainly, improved facilities like the Burnett Student Recreation and Fitness Center, renovations to the University Center, Walton Park and other green spaces on campus all play roles in Tennessee Tech investing in students.

We are also investing in campus facilities. Since 2012 – roughly the past 12 years – we have expended or have expenditures currently in progress for \$750,000,000 in campus improvements. Some of these include the new Burnett Student Recreation and Fitness Center, Lab Science Commons and Stonecipher Lecture Hall, Ashraf Islam Engineering Building, Roaden University Center expansion, the Peachtree pedestrian walkways, Centennial Plaza, and the band practice field.

We also invest in new academic programs. In just the past five years, we have had 10 new academic programs approved and initiated – including the live audio engineering program, design, nuclear engineering, logistics and supply chain, etc. If we include all the concentrations, the number increases to two or three dozen.

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We are investing in athletics because it is an important part of the campus. We increased the football operating budget and are already seeing results from that, the new West Side Stadium and the future Football Operations Center. We installed artificial turf and LED lighting on the baseball and softball fields. We have renovated men's and women's basketball locker rooms and added a new golf short game practice area at the golf course.

We have discussed previously the words I do not like to hear are "Tennessee Tech is a well-kept secret." That must stop. So, we have invested significantly into our communication and marketing to make sure our brand identity is more fully recognized across the entire state of Tennessee. We are making more aggressive efforts with strategic use of news stories.

We use our advertising dollars strategically. We have invested in predictive analytics to make sure we are marketing the right messages and to the right markets. We are making better use of the volume of marketing print pieces and offering more out-of-town recruitment events.

The last item to highlight is research. We continue to invest in research opportunities and growing the research enterprise on campus. We invest in additional support for graduate research assistants. We have assistance for faculty with proposal development, matching funds for research proposals, and maybe one of the biggest ways, startup funding for new faculty to help them get started with competitive research.

So, what is the return? The return can be broken down into three large categories. The present return on investment (ROI) to the state of Tennessee, an ROI to Tennessee Tech campus, and an ROI to the students. Possibly the students are most important, but they are all important.

So, Tennessee Tech currently has an economic impact annually of more than \$1,100,000,000 to the state of Tennessee. That is about a 10-to 15-fold return on the state appropriation dollars to Tennessee Tech. That is a great financial return we are giving to the state of Tennessee.

In addition to the financial return, we are producing 2000-2500 career-ready graduates every year that go straight into the workforce and help supply much-needed talent for the growing economy of Tennessee. These are typically in high demand areas, because that is the kind of graduates we produce. So, the ROI to the state of Tennessee is substantial.

The ROI to Tennessee Tech is also clear. Enrollment is up seven percent over the past three years. That translates to somewhere around \$7,000,000 of additional tuition revenue, just through enrollment growth. At this point in time, the domestic new freshman for fall 2025 applications are six percent above last year's applications and admitted students for fall 2025 are up eleven percent over the previous year. It demonstrates we are getting a return on the investment we are making in those regards.

This fall's Freshman enrollment was 2511 – the largest enrollment since 2015. The past three freshman classes have been three of the five largest freshman classes in the history of the university.

In Athletics, out of five fall sports, four finished in the top three of the Ohio Valley Conference and two of those won conference titles. We are currently first place in the Commissioner's Cup for the best overall sports program in the Ohio Valley.

We had record research funding last year of over \$46,000,000, and as has been noted, we are getting more substantial press coverage for Tennessee Tech than ever in the Nashville, Knoxville and Chattanooga markets. He stated that about half of Tennessee Tech students graduate one hundred percent debt free.

We are seeing higher graduation rates that continue to climb. Students are being offered improved career opportunities. And probably more important in the long run, although they may not realize it at the time, the value of the degree they are earning from Tennessee Tech will become more valuable with time.

In conclusion, President Oldham stated that he wanted to thank the Board for their support in helping Tennessee Tech invest, invest in the right areas, invest in the areas that are going to be the most meaningful and pay off the biggest ROI. He stated that he wants to encourage us to continue to be thoughtful and strategic about our investments and to understand that investing in the future of Tennessee Tech is not an option, it is a necessity.

Dr. Luna stated that she had two ideas for future investment: health insurance for graduate students and investing in mental health by adding additional counselors. President Oldham replied that these items are on his radar, and he had conversations earlier that day about how to move forward on things like that. He stated that the mental health issue is an important one but it is a bigger challenge than just our campus. He had an opportunity at the Governor's budget hearing to discuss this with the Governor, the Governor's staff and legislative leaders, as well. Off-campus mental health support also needs to be in place across the state of Tennessee.

As an academic institution, serving as a healthcare agency is not our primary role. We depend on outside structures to assist us with this and many times those mental health challenges outstrip our capabilities, regardless of how many counselors we might have, but we are going to do everything we can on campus to address the concern.

AGENDA ITEM VII – BOARD POLICY 009 (ACCREDITORS)

Mr. Jones moved to adopt Board Policy 009. Dr. Luna seconded the motion. Mr. Wray called a roll call vote. The motion carried unanimously.

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**AGENDA ITEM IX.A. – AUDIT & BUSINESS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION – FY2024-25
REVISED BUDGET/ORGANIZATIONAL CHART**

Mr. Stites moved to approve the 2024-25 Revised Budget and Organizational Chart. Mr. Jones seconded the motion. Mr. Wray called a roll call vote. The motion carried unanimously.

**AGENDA ITEM IX.B. – AUDIT & BUSINESS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION – TUITION
TRANSPARENCY ACT REPORT (T.C.A. § 49-7-1604)**

Mr. Stites moved to approve the Tuition Transparency Act Report for FY23-24. Mr. Jones seconded the motion. Mr. Wray called a roll call vote. The motion carried unanimously.

**AGENDA ITEM IX.C. – AUDIT & BUSINESS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION – DISCLOSED
PROJECTS**

Mr. Stites moved to approve the Disclosed Projects for the Crossville Facility Roof and Window Repairs, Whitney Avenue parking lot, and the track and field facility. Mr. Jones seconded the motion. Mr. Wray called a roll call vote. The motion carried unanimously.

AGENDA ITEM X – BOARD SECRETARY REPORT

Mr. Wray reminded Trustees to complete their Conflict-of-Interest form and submit the completed form to Diane Smith. Because Board policy 009 (Accreditation) was approved at that meeting, he also reminded Trustees that Board policies can be accessed via Policy Tech on the Tennessee Tech webpage. Policies one through five are operational policies (e.g., Board committees, election of officers, hiring of the President, etc.) The other three – now four – Board policies are university policies, (e.g., the Accreditors policy approved today, Free Speech on Campus policy, Nondiscrimination policy, etc.) because the Legislature required those policies fall under the Board's direction.

Chair Harper stated that Mr. Stites had requested an educational session on accounting and finance, and that session would be scheduled as availability permits.

AGENDA ITEM XI – OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

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AGENDA ITEM XII – ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Tennessee Tech Board of Trustees meeting adjourned at 2:50 p.m.

Approved,

LEE Wray 04/29/25

Lee Wray, Secretary