



## **BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**September 25, 2025**

**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, September 25, 2025, in Roaden University Center Room 282. Chair Rhedona Rose called the meeting to order at 1:34 p.m.

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

Michael Allen  
Teresa Chasteen-Dunn  
Trudy Harper  
Tom Jones  
Fred Lowery  
Thomas Lynn  
Garry McNabb  
Camron Rudd  
Braxton Westbrook  
Barry Wilmore - absent  
Rhedona Rose

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

#### **AGENDA ITEM II – SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENTS**

Chair Rose stated that President Oldham championed the creation of the Trailblazers five years ago. The 70 or so Trailblazers are the elite, competitively selected group of students who add the “personal” in “It's Personal.” They lead campus VIP tours, are trained in Tech traditions and leadership, assist with large campus recruiting events, and impact prospective students' decisions to choose Tech. Jimmy Gaudalupe, Cailey Martin and Audrey Perry shared

LEE 12/17/25

information about their roles as Trailblazers.

Jackson Ragland, a chemical engineer and Spanish double major, is a sophomore by time in college, but a senior by credit hours. He discussed his study abroad trip to Valencia, Spain this past summer, his preparation before going, his experiences there, and how the experiences affected him.

### **AGENDA ITEM III – APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Chair Rose asked for approval of the minutes of the June 26, 2025, Tennessee Tech Board of Trustees meeting. Chair Rose asked if there were questions or comments regarding the minutes. There being none, Trustee Rudd moved to recommend approval of the June 26, 2025, Board of Trustees minutes. Trustee Allen seconded the motion. Chair Rose called for a voice vote. The motion carried 9-0.

### **AGENDA ITEM IV – STUDENT TRUSTEE REPORT**

Trustee Westbrook presented his initial report as Trustee. His report reflected on what students are noticing as the semester gets underway, the experiences that help them settle in, their academic achievements thus far and the everyday conditions that shape how they as students study, meet and move across campus.

He stated that the Week of Welcome did what it was designed to do and that was to bring people together—to mix and mingle – early in the semester, with the emphasis on early. The College Town Kickoff on Cookeville's west side was anchored by a concert from Flo Rida. The concert served as a true opener, not only for our campus but also for our community.

Early check-in with SGA's (Student Government Association's) first-year assembly showed this semester started on solid academic footing. Respondents reported experiencing a strong sense of belonging and indicated it was straightforward as to how to get involved in organizations and events.

Trustee Westbrook stated that parking remained the greatest point of concern. Every student listed parking and transportation as an area they would like to see improvement in and that is consistent with feedback from prior years.

Another point of concern was wi-fi congestion. On occasion, students experience slow speeds or drop connections in areas with a large amount of people and high traffic volume like Swoops Food Court and the library, as well as in some residence halls. These problems impact students' ability to study and complete course work on time. He stated that he was pleased to share that students have had productive conversations with university administrators to explore solutions to these issues.

Another campus safety walk was recently led by the SGA's Secretary of Environment and

lee 12/17/25  
Page 2 of 8

Health, Cory Heineman. Doing so brought students together with University Police, Facilities, the Accessible Education Center, and others with face-to-face conversations while moving along the routes students use most.

The Upper Cumberland College Fair brought high school students to the Recreation and Fitness Center, and many served as hosts and guides. Those students described the day as energetic and purposeful.

As we prepare for Preview Day and welcome prospective students, current students stand ready as proud ambassadors of the university. Students will share that Tennessee Tech is a place where students, faculty and administration work together to create a sense of community that makes this campus, and this town feel like home.

Academic work is also showing up in public in ways that are relevant. Students in economics launched “Everyone Loves Economics” which is a student-produced podcast from the College of Business that turns classwork into public scholarship. Each episode they release centers on the question that students are actively wrestling with, like pay transparency and interviews of professors in the Tennessee Tech Economics department.

Additionally, for the second year in a row, the sitting Tennessee FFA (Future Farmers of America) President chose to enroll at Tech - an uncommon back-to-back vote of confidence from the top student agriculture leaders. Last fall, T. Wayne Williams, an agricultural communications major with a pre-law focus, chose Tech. This fall, Weston Brown, a Greene County native, also selected Tech, citing the campus family feel and the advantage of having the Tennessee FFA Foundation offices here.

Tech alumni are getting attention. Football helmets now include a small decal honoring alumnus and Trustee Barry Wilmore, and the Board’s naming of Wilmore Way gives the campus corridor a story to match its daily use. The Ashraf Islam Engineering Building is part of the story with open study areas and steady use. The building is a place where collaboration happens naturally between classes. Tours now pause there, not only because the building is new but because it exemplifies the kind of future-oriented work students want to do.

In conclusion, students entered this academic year engaged and eager to make their mark. They see administrators working to put Tech students first from new or improved buildings and grounds to ongoing upgrades to classroom and instructional technology. The partnership approach to campus improvement is students’ confidence that their voices matte

## **AGENDA ITEM V – PRESIDENT’S REPORT**

President Oldham welcomed new Board members and thanked Provost John Liu for serving as interim Provost and Marc Burnett for returning to campus to serve as interim Vice President for Student Affairs, while national searches are done to fill those two positions.

President Oldham stated that the numbers one, two, 11, 16 ½, 80, 95, 257, 2028, and 10,701 are all important numbers currently at Tennessee Tech. He began with “U.S. News Best Colleges Rankings” that were just released. He stated that we are, once again, ranked as Best National University. U.S. News categorizes colleges and universities in different categories; the national ranking is the highest level. We have been ranked nationally for 11 years now. We jumped 31 spots this year and came in at number 257. If you narrow that down to top public universities in the U.S., we would be in the top 150 public universities. We are currently tied for the second place among public universities in Tennessee. We have the lowest median debt for graduates among Tennessee public universities, and we rank in the top 50 in the nation for lowest median debt.

They do additional rankings with social mobility, engineering, business, computer science and other disciplines, and the A+ Schools for B students. All of these are good indicators of recognition for the value that exists at Tennessee Tech. People outside of the state who may not know Tennessee Tech at all will see these kinds of rankings and in many cases will say “I want to learn more about Tech, or I want to dig a little deeper here.”

The return on investment (ROI)-based rankings, like Money Magazine where we continue to be in the Best Colleges of America, are tied currently. This year, we are number one again in Tennessee and are tied for the highest ranking in Tennessee for return on investment. We also rank in SmartAsset, Pay Scale, the College Return on Investment Report and Best Value Colleges. All of these combined address the same thing -- the combination of affordability, access, and outcome; career opportunities afforded by Tech graduates; and top starting salaries in Tennessee among public universities in Tennessee.

There are also niche ratings that have value. Tech appears in 50 rankings (national and in Tennessee.) For example, Best Colleges in America and again, Number Two Public University in Tennessee, College with the Best Professors in America, and Best College Campuses in America.

Other rankings where we show up: Forbes Top Colleges (number two public in Tennessee) and America’s Best Employers in the State. Also, we rank in the Princeton Review rankings: Best in South and Green Colleges. All these together provide a clear picture of how we are perceived outside of our local area.

On the institutional dashboard, there is the 10,701 number mentioned, the official headcount enrollment this fall. That is Tennessee Tech’s largest head count enrollment in ten years. This is close to a two percent increase year over year from last year. Over the last four years, we have seen a 2.3 percent increase in enrollment year over year.

We experienced a seven-year downward trend in enrollment and there are many reasons for that. Of course, COVID was part of the decrease, and we saw a decline in international student enrollment, as well as Tennessee Promise and other things that were beyond our control. Around 2018-19, we started major initiatives to change how we recruit students and how, strategically, we grow. We changed how we award scholarships, how we market, and how we

brand ourselves. The last four years has resulted in an upward trend.

This year's freshmen class includes 2028 students. The average high school GPA is 3.72 with 24.1 being the average ACT. Thirty-seven percent of this year's freshmen class had a perfect 4.0 GPA in high school.

We get a lot of especially good students, and they come to us, largely because they see the value proposition and the personal approach resonates with them tremendously. We have seen that reflected in the "80" number mentioned. The current first-year retention rate -- 80.1 percent -- is the highest in the history of Tennessee Tech. Getting that ranking to 80 percent was a goal for us several years ago. Subsequently, we raised the goal to 82 percent and we haven't quite reached the new goal. But that's a ten percent increase over the last decade. And, most importantly, that's a lot of students, approximately 200 students that continue their education at Tennessee Tech that ten years ago would not have.

We saw a bit of a drop in graduation rates around COVID. We are seeing that rebounding and are getting back on track now. Obviously, the six-year graduation rate, the national standard, takes a long time to turn that ship around. So, you begin to see progress first in the four- and then the five-year graduation rates. Substantial improvement can be seen in both of those. We are getting close to reaching fifty percent four-year graduation rates which will be a significant goal and milestone for us. Students are graduating on time and that is a big part of what is helping us keep their student loan debt down and manageable for them once they graduate. So, getting students to graduate in a timely fashion is the biggest advantage we can give them.

This fall, we have students enrolled from all 95 counties in Tennessee. Not all 95 counties are represented in our freshmen class, but they are all represented in the current student body. I think it is remarkable that we attract students from one end of the state to the other.

The current student/faculty ratio is quite attractive at 16 ½:1. He stated that when he came here 13 years ago, the student/faculty ratio was 22:1. We have moved this in a very positive way, and it gives students more access to faculty throughout their educational experience.

How do we keep this momentum going? One thing that was brought up by Provost Liu this morning was academic majors. Provost Liu is doing a lot of good work in this area, working with Deans and department chairs to take some of our high-performing areas of academic concentrations and standing them up as full-blown academic majors. We have a lot of successful academic programs here on campus that fly under the radar, particularly for prospective students because we don't list them as academic majors. They are currently concentrations within disciplines.

By taking these concentrations and elevating them to majors, it helps us market these programs more effectively. One of the concerns we sometimes get from prospective students is that they are not sure we have their major of interest. Often, we are just not listing it in a way that they recognize it.

*Lee Mink*

The other one that has been talked about is student life. And we have a quick video to show on student life to go along with the ones you saw earlier today.

As an institution we are well known for academics. Our reputation is strong academically. Sometimes we do not have enough for students to do to have fun, to have the full college experience. But we have made a huge effort to not only increase the level of available activity, and it gets back to the earlier question about weekends and students staying on weekends. We have partnered with the City of Cookeville, and I can't say enough positive things about our partnerships with the city, the Chamber of Commerce, and the local business owners, particularly on the west side, assisting in any number of ways.

There is a growing understanding of how everyone benefits from this. The students benefit, the campus benefits, the local businesses benefit, and the city and the Chamber benefit. It has been beneficial since we initiated College Town Kickoff a few years ago. We had 8,000 people, many of them students, crammed onto Broad Street on the west side for a concert, but I also saw a lot of middle-aged folks from the community. It was a wonderful experience for the students and local folks and really helped propel Cookeville as Tennessee's college town to another level. We look forward to continuing some of those things.

We have College Town Weekends on a regular basis that help provide opportunities or options for students to stay and be engaged on weekends. The west side initiated a new program over the last year with Wings Up Wednesdays. They market and invite students to restaurants, stores, etc. for special opportunities. We continue these discussions with the City of Cookeville and civic leaders on how we can ratchet those up to new levels.

However, we play a big role here on campus as well and Athletics is a big part of that. We have the 11<sup>th</sup> ranked football team in FCS (Football Championship Subdivision) national rankings this week. That has been a tremendous improvement over past years and I believe there is a growing sense of pride on campus in that. We are learning how to win in football and how to be a winning institution athletically. It is fun to watch, and it is a different mentality when you go in every week, and you expect to win.

I believe there is confidence and pride that is beginning to take root on campus because of that. As Braxton mentioned, moving to the Southern Conference brings another level of energy and excitement because it is a whole new group of folks to get to know, visit and have them visit us, and there is a lot of excitement around that.

Student organizations play a big role in this. We incorporated that into our Preview Day which is scheduled to take place this Saturday. There is an academic piece to Preview Day where all the academic departments are showcased for prospective students. They get a chance to visit faculty and other students in those academic areas and get a feel for if that's something they want to pursue or not. There is a student organization piece to this, so prospective students get a feel of all the student organizations. I think we have 300 student organizations on campus

currently to choose from. There are a lot of extramural activities that students can be engaged in, and this gives them an upfront look at that before they choose the campus to attend.

In summary, I would say Tech is well positioned to see a significant improvement wave and increase enrollment, retention, research success, athletic success, and all the areas of campus really moving in a positive direction. But it is not time, nor probably will it ever be time, to be content or satisfied. We are looking at all these areas where we can do even better and get the story of Tennessee Tech and the value of an education here out to a larger number of prospective students.

Thank you for all your support, your suggestions, and your encouragement. It's vitally important and we just look forward to seeing where Tennessee Tech is going to go soon.

**AGENDA ITEM VI – CONSENT AGENDA – A. EXPEDITED NEW ACADEMIC PROGRAM PROPOSAL (ENAPP) FOR THE MASTER OF SCIENCE (MS) IN INDUSTRIAL AND SYSTEMS ENGINEERING B. TENURE UPON APPOINTMENT RECOMMENDATION**

Chair Rose asked for approval of the consent agenda. Trustee Jones moved to pass the consent agenda as presented. Trustee Rudd seconded the motion. Chair Rose asked if there was any discussion. There being none, Chair Rose called for a voice vote. The motion carried 9-0.

**AGENDA ITEM VII – AUDIT & BUSINESS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS – A. MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT**

Chair Rose asked for approval of the Master Plan Amendment. Upon the committee's recommendation, Trustee Jones moved the Board to approve the Master Plan Amendment. Because the recommendation came from committee, no second was needed. Chair Rose asked if there was any discussion. There being none, Secretary Wray called a roll call vote. The motion passed 9-0.

**AGENDA ITEM VII – AUDIT & BUSINESS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS – B. ORGANIZATIONAL CHART CHANGE**

Chair Rose asked for approval of the crosswalk of organizational changes with a proposed implementation date of October 1, 2025. Upon the committee's recommendation, Trustee Jones moved the Board to approve the organizational chart. Because the recommendation came from committee, no second was needed. Chair Rose asked if there was any discussion. There being none, Secretary Wray called a roll call vote. The motion passed 9-0.

**AGENDA ITEM VIII – BOARD SECRETARY REPORT**

Secretary Wray announced that Preview Day would be held on Saturday on the lawn of the Lab Sciences Commons building. He stated that it would begin at 9 am and end around 1 pm.

THEC will have a convening on Sunday, October 12, from 4 - 8 pm and on Monday, October 13, from 8 am – 3pm at MTSU. The convening is for all Trustees across the state. Senior leadership is also invited.

#### **AGENDA ITEM IX – BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING DATES**

The next meeting will be held on December 4, 2025. Meeting dates for calendar year 2026 will be:

March 12  
June 25  
September 24  
December 3

#### **AGENDA ITEM X – OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

#### **AGENDA ITEM XI – ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the Tennessee Tech Board of Trustees meeting adjourned at 2:59 p.m.

Approved,

 12/17/25  
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Lee Wray, Secretary