

STUDENT AFFAIRS NEWSLETTER

The Division of Student Affairs Quarterly Newsletter



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BOARD OF TRUSTEES NAMES AIKENS INTERIM VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS

At its quarterly meeting on December 4, Tennessee Tech University's Board of Trustees approved a cabinet-level interim appointment that directly impacts students. During the board's executive committee session, trustees unanimously supported President Phil Oldham's recommendation to appoint Katie Aikens, Ed.D., as interim vice president for student affairs.

Dr. Aikens is a two-time Tech graduate and Upper Cumberland native who has dedicated more than 20 years of service to the university. She made history in 2017 as the first woman to serve as Tech's dean of students, and in 2021 she expanded her leadership responsibilities as assistant vice president for strategic initiatives.



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Her long record of service reflects a deep commitment to student life and campus growth.

President Oldham highlighted her dedication to the university and her ability to lead Student Affairs with vision and care. The board’s unanimous approval underscores the confidence in her leadership and the importance of student-centered decision making at Tech.

Before the vote, Aikens addressed the trustees and emphasized her priorities for the role. “Student Affairs’ focus has been and will continue to be on student engagement, student wellbeing and overall student success,” she said. “I’m pleased for the opportunity to serve our students and our dedicated Student Affairs professionals, and I appreciate your consideration.” Students can expect continued support for involvement, wellness, and success initiatives under her leadership.



CELEBRATING TRADITION: HOMECOMING 2025 RECAP

Tennessee Tech University welcomed alumni, students, faculty, staff, and the community for a week of spirited celebrations during Homecoming 2025, held October 27 through November 1. With the theme “Tech on Broadway,” the week featured a variety of events that highlighted campus pride, student creativity, and alumni connections.

Homecoming week kicked off with the Banner Competition and a Crowdfunding Drive for the campus Food Pantry. Students enjoyed the Homecoming Court elections, Carnival on the Quad, Lip Sync Competition, and Hangout at Centennial Plaza. Alumni reconnected through reunions across departments and joined a parade watch party at the Crawford Alumni Center.

On Saturday, November 1, the excitement reached its peak with the Homecoming Parade along Dixie Avenue. Leading the procession was Tennessee Tech alumnus, trustee, and retired NASA astronaut Barry “Butch” Wilmore, who served as grand marshal.

The parade celebrated the crowning of Mr. and Ms. Tennessee Tech 2025, James Hensley and Riverland Gordon, before fans filled Tucker Stadium for the Homecoming football game. The Golden Eagles capped off the week with a thrilling 27–21 victory over Gardner-Webb University.



CAMPUS HEALTH LEADERS UNITE

In November, Leigh Ann Ray and Kim Williams played a key role in planning and hosting the First Annual College Health Center Directors' Meeting for Tennessee's public universities. The one-day conference, held on the campus of Middle Tennessee State University, brought together Directors, Assistant Directors, and Health Services administrators from nearly every public institution across the state.

The gathering provided an important forum for collaboration and dialogue, with participants engaging in meaningful discussions on critical topics including staffing, employee retention, workflow efficiency, health promotion initiatives, and data collection practices. By fostering shared insights and strategies, the conference marked a significant step forward in strengthening health services for students across Tennessee.



EMPOWERING SUPPORT: COUNSELING TEAM ADVANCES MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING

On September 26, Dr. Christina Mick and Selah Kurtz from the Center for Counseling and Mental Health Wellness attended Mental Health First Aid training in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Dr. Mick successfully completed her re-certification, reaffirming her commitment to staying current with best practices in mental health support. Selah Kurtz earned her initial certification, marking an important step in her professional development within the field.

Mental Health First Aid is an evidence-based training program that equips individuals with the knowledge and skills to assist those experiencing mental health challenges or crises. By recognizing signs and offering appropriate support, certified participants play a vital role in fostering a more informed and compassionate community.



LIGHTING OF THE QUAD BRINGS HOLIDAY CHEER TO CAMPUS

On December 2, students, faculty, and staff gathered on The Quad at 5:30 p.m. for one of Tennessee Tech's favorite traditions, the annual Lighting of the Quad. The evening was filled with holiday spirit as music played, hot cider was served, and friends came together to kick off the holiday season.

The moment the lights switched on, the Quad transformed into a festive wonderland. From now through the holidays, the lights will glow each evening at 5 p.m., creating the perfect backdrop for walks, study breaks, or photo ops with friends.

As the semester winds down, this tradition reminds us of the warmth and community that make Tennessee Tech special. Here's to celebrating the season together. Wishing everyone a wonderful holiday break and a happy new year. Wings Up!



MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS IN ACTION

This fall, the Center for Counseling and Mental Health Wellness hosted several impactful events, beginning with the I'm Alive Mental Health Fair on October 28, where students engaged with campus and community partners, explored wellness resources, and created positive art messages.

On November 12, the Center partnered with the Center for Addiction and Prevention Support to hold a Friendsgiving Community Night, offering food, games, and information about mental health resources. Extending its reach beyond campus, on November 16, Dr. Christina Mick presented on counselor advocacy at the Tennessee Counseling Association annual conference in Nashville, highlighting the Center's commitment to both student wellness and professional leadership.

Together, these efforts underscore the Center's dedication to fostering a healthier, more connected campus community.



MARC BURNETT: A SEASON OF STEADFAST GUIDANCE

Throughout the fall 2025 semester, the Division of Student Affairs was fortunate to have the steady leadership of Marc Burnett, who graciously stepped into the interim Vice President role this past August.

His wealth of experience and deep commitment to students provided invaluable guidance during a period of transition, ensuring that the division remained focused on its mission of supporting student success. Marc's ability to navigate challenges with wisdom and care has been a source of stability and inspiration, and the division is deeply grateful for his dedication during this important time.

As Marc now, once again, turns the page to retirement, we extend our heartfelt thanks and best wishes. Marc's impact on the student experience will endure for years, leaving a legacy of service that continues to inspire. Wishing you all the best in this next chapter. You have truly earned it.



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