**Meeting of the Tennessee State University Board of Trustees**

**Student and Academic Affairs Committee Meeting**

**June 13, 2025**

**Tennessee State University – The Farrell Westbrook Complex (the “Barn”)**

**MINUTES**

**Committee Members Present:** Trustees Jeffery Norfleet, Terica Smith, and Artenzia Young-Seigler. Other Board members present: Dakasha Winton, Dimeta Smith Knight, Marquita Qualls, Charles Traughber, and Trevia Chatman.

**University Staff Present:** InterimPresident Dwayne Tucker; Ginette Garza Brown, Interim General Counsel and Board Secretary; Dr. Robbie Melton, Acting Interim Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs; Bradley White, Interim VP of Business and Finance; Sterlin Sanders, Chief Information Officer; LoLita Toney, Associate Vice President of Institutional Advancement; Jim Grady, Alvarez & Marsal;

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Trustee Norfleet called the meeting to order at 9:07 a.m.

1. **ROLL CALL/DECLARATION OF A QUORUM**

Committee Chair Norfleet declared that all members were present, constituting a quorum. Secretary Brown conducted the roll call. The following committee members were present: Trustees Jeffery Norfleet, Terica Smith, and Artenzia Young-Seigler.

1. **APPROVAL OF MARCH 13, 2025, STUDENT AND ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

The minutes from the March 13, 2025, meeting of the Student and Academic Affairs Committee were approved as submitted, with Trustee Smith making the motion and Trustee Young-Seigler seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

1. **APPROVAL OF APRIL 28, 2025, STUDENT AND ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

The minutes from the April 28, 2025, meeting of the Student and Academic Affairs Committee were approved as submitted, with Trustee Smith making the motion and Trustee Young-Seigler seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

1. **STUDENT AFFAIRS REPORT**

Committee Chair Norfleet announced the next agenda item, which was the Student Affairs Report. Committee Chair Norfleet introduced Dr. Bridget Goldman to provide the Board with a summary on behalf of the Student and Academic Affairs Committee.

Dr. Goldman provided an update on **residential life and housing**, reporting that resident students collectively achieved an average GPA of **3.16** over the past year. She emphasized that, despite the negative media attention surrounding housing challenges, this achievement reflected the determination and academic strength of Tennessee State University students. Residential life, she explained, is structured not only to provide housing but also to support students’ holistic development and sense of belonging on campus.

Dr. Goldman then highlighted the **programming efforts of Student Affairs**, which sponsored **122 events** across cultural, health and wellness, educational, social, and service-learning categories. She explained that each of these programs was designed to enrich the student experience and to foster engagement beyond the classroom.

In reviewing notable student achievements, Dr. Goldman reported that the **TSU Cheerleaders**, under new director Dwight Polk, earned **fifth place** at the 2025 NCAA College Nationals in Daytona, Florida—the highest placement in university history. She also noted that the **New Directions Choir** received the **HBCU Choir of the Year People’s Choice Award**, and that **James Sexton** had been appointed Interim Director of the Aristocratic Bands.

Turning to **international student enrollment**, Dr. Goldman expressed concern about the downward trend in issued I-20s. In fall 2024, TSU had issued **138 I-20s** to admitted students, of which only **42 were completed**. By contrast, as of spring 2025 only **10 I-20s** had been issued. She explained that international students face increasingly long delays in securing embassy interviews and approvals, which significantly complicates enrollment projections and reduces certainty for both students and the university.

Dr. Goldman also touched on **orientation participation** as an early enrollment indicator, reporting that **461 students**—a mix of freshmen and transfers—had registered for upcoming sessions.

Her remarks also highlighted investments in **student health and wellness**. She announced the **grand reopening of the Wellness Center on April 9, 2025**, which now offers new equipment and expanded access. In addition, she detailed the implementation of **TimelyCare**, a virtual health platform launched in January. Since its rollout, **657 students** had registered for the service, with **134 students accessing counseling sessions** and **17 utilizing psychiatric services**. The on-campus Health Center had also experienced increased student visits, reflecting an overall rise in engagement with health and wellness resources.

At this point, Dr. Goldman opened the floor for questions. **Trustee Qualls** inquired specifically about the **impact of declining I-20 issuances on graduate student enrollment** and how this reduction might affect the university’s research capacity. Dr. Goldman explained that her office manages the admissions process and issues I-20s for incoming international students but that graduate enrollment is overseen primarily by Academic Affairs and the Graduate School. She provided additional context, noting that in fall 2024 TSU admitted **96 graduate students**, with **42 I-20s issued**, compared to **98 admitted the prior year**, resulting in a decline of **54 students**. She further explained that graduate student recruitment often relies on faculty-driven efforts, including MOUs and established international partnerships, which help students navigate embassy requirements and secure placements.

In response to the portion of Trustee Qualls’ question regarding research implications, Dr. Goldman acknowledged the concern, stressing that international graduate students often play a vital role in faculty research projects. However, she noted that the full impact of reduced enrollment on research output and funding would need to be addressed in greater detail by the Academic Affairs division. She committed to coordinating with her colleagues to provide additional information.

With no further questions, Dr. Goldman concluded her Student Affairs update and transitioned into the enrollment discussion.

1. **ENROLLMENT UPDATE**

After her report on Student Affairs, Committee Chair Norfleet announced the next item on the agenda, the Enrollment Update. He invited Dr. Bridget Goldman to continue with her summary and provide the Board with an update on behalf of the Student and Academic Affairs Committee.

Dr. Goldman introduced Mr. Ken Anselment, Vice President for Enrollment Management with RHB, a division of Strata Information Group (SIG), who has been assisting TSU in its strategic enrollment efforts. Mr. Anselment introduced himself and described RHB’s role. He explained that his team had been engaged to provide technical support with admissions systems, data integrity, and Banner, which had accumulated significant deferred maintenance. He emphasized that TSU’s challenges must also be viewed within the context of a shifting national landscape, marked by demographic decline, new policy proposals, and heightened financial pressures—including discussions in Congress about institutions potentially bearing costs associated with student loan defaults. Despite these challenges, he noted, TSU retains a resilient core of students who continue to choose the institution, a strength that can be leveraged moving forward.

Turning to enrollment data, Mr. Anselment reported that as of two days prior, TSU had received 1,094 freshman confirmations. Because the University does not require enrollment deposits, he clarified that these confirmations remain “soft.” Historically, only 50–65 percent of confirmed students ultimately matriculate, which suggested a likely yield between 525 and 860 freshmen—falling short of the 968 goal embedded in the university’s five-year pro forma. He added that three weeks earlier, the projection range had been 971–1,261, indicating some improvement, though the trend remained below expectations.

Trustee Traughber asked whether the enrollment target of 968 first-time freshmen aligned with assumptions in the university’s financial planning. Jim Grady clarified that while the long-term pro forma assumed 968 freshmen, the FY 2026 proposed budget was constructed more conservatively at 700, given current uncertainties. Trustee Qualls then asked if the student “purge” process, where unpaid students are dropped from course rolls, would affect enrollment numbers. Jim Grady explained that incoming freshmen are not subject to the same purge process, though other fluctuations in enrollment are still possible.

Mr. Anselment then noted encouraging results in transfer enrollment. More than 250 confirmations had already been received, a number lower than in 2024 but higher than in 2023, suggesting modest positive momentum in that category.

Dr. Goldman addressed barriers in communication with prospective students. She reported that admitted students frequently expressed frustration at limited follow-up, despite campaigns such as “You Belong Here” reaching over 2,000 prospective students in Memphis. These campaigns had achieved strong open rates exceeding 70% but did not produce event attendance until alumni actively promoted the materials. Conversely, when student ambassadors initiated personalized outreach via their own social media accounts and email addresses rather than generic university channels, engagement was immediate, with registrations for orientation surging within thirty minutes. Dr. Goldman highlighted the University’s inability to send text messages under the current system as a key obstacle, noting that most prospective students do not answer calls from unknown numbers.

Both Dr. Goldman and Mr. Anselment then outlined forward-looking strategies, including:

* The launch of Slate CRM, which went live the previous day. This system will integrate undergraduate and graduate recruitment, enable text messaging, and provide granular tracking of student engagement.
* Simplification of scholarship structures, supported by Alvarez & Marsal, to ensure programs are competitive and sustainable.
* Marketing and storytelling efforts, beginning with “circles of influence” research, in which consultants will interview current students to refine TSU’s value proposition.
* Restructuring enrollment management functions into a single, unified division encompassing undergraduate and graduate admissions, financial aid, and communications.
* Development of a comprehensive Strategic Enrollment Management Plan to assess institutional capacity, pipelines, and long-term growth.
* Early lead-generation campaigns targeting high school freshmen and sophomores in Tennessee, Georgia, and Chicago to strengthen TSU’s presence in key markets.

Mr. Anselment concluded this portion by reiterating that despite current challenges, TSU’s story resonates when told directly to students and families. With better systems, clearer messaging, and intentional pipelines, she expressed confidence that the university could gradually improve enrollment outcomes.

Trustee Norfleet then engaged in a broader discussion regarding specific initiatives to bolster the Fall 2025 entering class. Dr. Goldman responded that TSU was taking a proactive stance, launching targeted initiatives rather than “allowing things to happen to us.” She described the “You Belong at TSU” campaign in greater detail, highlighting that it involved coordinated outreach across social media, video production, and student-generated content. A scholarship contest was introduced, offering $2,500 awards to students whose videos achieved at least 10,000 likes, thereby encouraging engagement and visibility. She also described meet-and-greet events being held in Memphis, Atlanta, and Chicago, and explained that she would be traveling to Atlanta immediately after the meeting to meet with confirmed students.

As of that week, she reported, TSU had 1,102 confirmations. To stabilize the budget, the University would need at least 900 freshmen enrolled, meaning conversion of confirmed students to seated students was the central focus. Nearly every division of student services had been mobilized to this end. For example, the Dean of Student Conduct and the Director of Disability Services were leading FAFSA completion campaigns, hosting twice-weekly sessions, sending letters, and working late evenings to ensure financial aid files were completed. Many admitted students, she explained, mistakenly believed confirmation alone secured their enrollment, when unresolved financial aid paperwork could still create barriers.

Trustee Qualls then asked about the 1,102 confirmations, specifically whether they represented students applying directly to TSU or via the Black Common App. She cautioned that if the majority of confirmations came through the common application, TSU would face increased competition in converting them into actual enrollees, since those students likely had multiple options. Dr. Goldman responded with a breakdown: over 25,000 applications had been initiated through the Black Common App, but only 1,180 were completed. Of those admitted, 1,304 were in-state students and 4,685 were out-of-state. She acknowledged that most applications flowed through the Black Common App but assured the Board that the implementation of Slate CRM would soon provide much more detailed reporting on application sources and engagement trends.

Trustee Smith Knight asked about partnerships with community colleges and whether TSU was actively pursuing transfer pipelines. Dr. Goldman conceded that the university’s reputation in this area had been uneven but noted that rebuilding relationships and strengthening articulation agreements were high priorities. Transfer scholarships had once been as high as $10,000, though they had since been reduced. Even so, she noted that transfer enrollment showed promising resilience. Trustee Chatman further asked if paid, geo-targeted advertising was being utilized. Goldman acknowledged that most outreach to date had been grassroots but agreed that professional digital advertising was necessary to strengthen visibility.

Trustee Smith Knight raised a question about leveraging TSU’s numerous summer camps and dual-enrollment programs as recruitment pipelines. Dr. Goldman admitted this had been a missed opportunity, largely due to understaffing in admissions. With new hires recently approved, the office now had the capacity to intentionally integrate these programs into recruitment strategies.

Trustee Smith Knight emphasized alumni engagement as a cost-effective recruitment tool. Dr. Goldman agreed, noting that alumni trainings had already been conducted and that the TSU Foundation was working with her team to secure scholarship matches for legacy students. She called alumni the University’s “biggest recruiters.”

As the discussion closed, Dr. Goldman shared the full-length “You Belong” video, which emphasized TSU’s identity as a family of “showstoppers and change makers.” President Tucker followed by affirming that TSU had a tremendous opportunity to improve upon current enrollment practices. He committed to presenting the Board with a more comprehensive enrollment strategy in the coming months, one that would begin earlier in the recruitment cycle and incorporate the lessons learned from this year’s efforts.

1. **APPROVAL OF LOW PRODUCING PROGRAMS ACTION**

Committee Chair Norfleet announced the next agenda item, which was the approval of the low producing programs. Committee Chair Norfleet introduced Dr. **Robbie Melton**, Interim Provost, to present action items regarding the review, closure, and modification of low-producing academic programs on behalf of the Student and Academic Affairs Committee.

Dr. Melton began by expressing her appreciation for the opportunity to serve as Interim Provost and recognized the contributions of the University’s academic leadership team, including deans, department chairs, associate vice presidents, faculty, and staff. She emphasized that the recommendations presented were the product of a **collaborative and data-driven process**, guided by enrollment trends, program outcomes, cost analyses, and alignment with TSU’s strategic mission.

Dr. Melton explained that the review spanned all degree levels—bachelor’s, master’s, specialist, and doctorate—over a **five-year period**, and included analyses of enrollment patterns, retention and graduation rates, operational costs, and programmatic relevance. She further noted that recommendations had been reviewed by the **Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC)** as well as internal school committees, ensuring regulatory compliance and adherence to institutional policies.

She identified several programs as low-producing, based on a **benchmark of ten students or fewer**, and presented specific recommendations:

1. **Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene** – Recommended for **sunset**. Dr. Melton emphasized that the **associate degree program remains active and is being enhanced**, as it is the primary source of TSU-trained dental hygienists. A formal **teach-out plan** ensures that current students can complete their degrees without disruption.
2. **Master of Science in Computer Information Systems Engineering** – Recommended for **formal closure**, with a subsequent **merger into the Master of Engineering program**. Dr. Melton clarified that THEC regulations require formal closure before a program can be modified or merged into another concentration.
3. **Specialist in Instructional Leadership (College of Education)** – Recommended for **closure**, also with an established teach-out plan. Closure was based on persistently low enrollment and program overlap within the College of Education.

Trustee Traughber inquired about the financial considerations that were addressed. Dr. Melton explained that the combined effect of program sunsets, modifications, and restructuring is projected to yield approximately **$1.2 million in annual cost savings**, which will be realized in the upcoming fiscal cycle. These savings reflect efficiencies gained through faculty vacancies, program consolidation, and streamlined operations.

In reference to the Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene, Trustee Smith Knight requested that Dr. Melton provide more details about the program. Dr. Melton explained that enrollment had consistently remained low, producing only one to three graduates per year. She reassured the Board that the **associate degree program remains robust** and continues to serve as the primary pipeline for dental hygienists, and that the closure of the bachelor’s program allows TSU to strategically reallocate resources without compromising workforce preparation.

Trustee Qualls raised regarding the process of modifying or merging a program following closure. Dr. Melton clarified that THEC’s State Authorization Council (SAC) has advised that formal closure followed by program modification is the appropriate procedure, and additional guidance from SAC personnel is available if needed. She also reiterated that all program closures and sunsets include formal teach-out plans to minimize any disruption for students and ensure degree completion.

Through these explanations, Dr. Melton conveyed that the decisions regarding low-producing programs were not taken lightly, but were grounded in data, regulatory guidance, and a commitment to maintain student success while enhancing institutional efficiency.

Trustee Norfleet called for a motion to recommend to the full Board the approval of the action on Low Producing Programs, as contained in the Board materials for the June 13, 2025, Board materials. Trustee Smith made the motion, and Trustee Young-Seigler seconding it. The motion passed unanimously.

1. **APPROVAL OF ACADEMIC PROGRAM MODIFICATIONS**

Committee Chair Norfleet announced the next agenda item, the approval of modifications to academic programs. He introduced Dr. Robbie Melton to discuss these modifications on behalf of the Student and Academic Affairs Committee.

Dr. Melton mentioned that the proposals included program modifications across multiple colleges, specifically the College of Business, the College of Education, the College of Engineering, the College of Health Sciences, the College of Liberal Arts, and the College of Life and Physical Sciences. Background materials had been provided in advance, including detailed program changes and supporting documentation on page 80 of the board materials.

Dr. Melton began with the **College of Business**, outlining a comprehensive departmental reorganization that consolidated four departments into three. This restructuring involved the inactivation of one department chair position and the realignment of faculty responsibilities. Dr. Melton emphasized that the process included formal faculty consultations, town halls, and internal reviews to ensure transparency and alignment with institutional goals. The reorganization was designed to strengthen curriculum delivery, maintain accreditation requirements, and optimize faculty workload. Trustee Young-Seigler asked about employment of faculty, and Dr. Melton clarified that faculty positions would be retained and reassigned as needed to align with strategic priorities. She also addressed the inactivation of the e-business technology concentration, explaining that it would merge into the Department of Business Information without affecting current student coursework.

For the **College of Health Sciences**, Dr. Melton described the movement of cardio-respiratory care sciences under the School of Nursing. The reorganization aimed to consolidate patient-facing programs to enhance efficiency, improve administrative oversight, and maintain compliance with accreditation standards. Dr. Melton confirmed that business-facing programs would remain separate and fully accredited.

Within the **College of Life and Physical Sciences**, Dr. Melton presented the inactivation of the Master of Science in Chemistry, explaining that this was a program realignment rather than an elimination. She clarified that students currently enrolled would be accommodated through completion plans, ensuring that academic progress would not be disrupted.

Dr. Melton then reviewed the broader impact of the **College of Business restructuring**, noting that senior faculty would serve as coordinators within remaining departments to maintain accountability, oversight of curriculum, and compliance with accreditation requirements, including the CPA pathway in accounting. She also addressed questions regarding the ongoing dean search for the College of Business, explaining that the interim dean and search committee were reviewing candidates to ensure leadership continuity and alignment with the restructuring plan.

Discussion included clarification on the distinction between academic unit modifications and academic program modifications. Dr. Melton explained that the proposed changes, including departmental consolidations and concentration inactivations, qualified as modifications to existing academic units. Certain changes, such as elevation of concentrations or program inactivations, would require Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) review, but all modifications maintained the integrity of curricula and accreditation compliance.

Following discussion, the committee agreed that final approval would be taken separately by college to ensure proper documentation and categorization of academic unit modifications, program modifications, and required notifications to THEC. Dr. Melton confirmed that all necessary support materials would be included with the motions for clarity.

Committee Chair Norfleet announced that Dr. Melton had a surprise to present to the Board. Dr. Melton introduced the segment, expressing excitement over the recent approval of Tennessee State University’s AI policy. Dr. Melton noted that the policy had elevated TSU’s visibility not only nationally but globally.

Dr. Melton then introduced a special guest representing TSU’s artificial intelligence initiatives, coding, creativity, and STEM programs, including robotics, engineering, computer science, and health sciences. She highlighted that TSU had pioneered the use of AI robotic dogs on campus and invited “Blue,” the AI robotic dog, to approach the board. Trustees were given the opportunity to view Blue, and Dr. Melton emphasized that this demonstration exemplified the university’s leadership in innovation and technology.

Dr. Melton continued, noting that TSU is establishing itself as a center for AI research through its AI for All Research Center, engaging all colleges and departments in interdisciplinary AI initiatives. She then introduced another AI entity, “Humanoid,” describing it as a recently arrived robot programmed by TSU’s smart team. Trustees observed as Humanoid interacted, stating:

“Hello, Tennessee State University Board of Trustees. It's a pleasure to greet you all. If there's anything I can do for you, just let me know.”

Dr. Melton highlighted that Humanoid is a first-of-its-kind presence at a regional university and that TSU students will have the opportunity to name the robot. She recognized the contributions of Dr. Lin Li from the College of Engineering and Dr. Ali Sekmen, who are leading the university’s AI initiatives, and invited Humanoid to demonstrate interactive capabilities.

Dr. Melton further showcased additional AI innovations, including the AI Healthcare Ring and AI-enabled glasses, noting that such technology is uniquely available at TSU. She concluded the demonstration by thanking the trustees for their attention and support for the university’s AI programs.

After a short break, the committee again turned to the discussion on the requested action on low-producing programs. Trustee Norfleet made a motion to table the action item to allow the administration to provide additional information to the committee the following week and provide some more clarity. Trustee Smith seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

1. **ADJOURNMENT**

Trustee Norfleet moved to adjourn, with the motion seconded by Trustee Young-Siegler. A roll call vote was taken, with Trustees Smith Norfleet, Smith, and Young-Siegler voting in favor of the motion. The meeting was adjourned.