

Tennessee State University
Faculty Senate Meeting Minutes
October 17, 2024

Present: Provost Robbie Melton, AVP Erik Schmeller, Dr. Bridgett Golman, Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senator Reginald Archer, Dr. Iris Johnson Arnold, , Senator Guinevere Bennett, Senator Kenneth Chilton, Dr. Shone Hughes, Senator Jason de Koff, Senator Poliala Dickson, Senator Cynthia Gadsden, Senator Cynthia George, Senator Sagnika Ghosh, Senator Sujata Guha, Dr. Retta Guy, Senator Mohammad Habibi, Senator Julie Huskey, Dr. Tim Jones, Senator Bill Johnson, Senator Natasha Johnson, Senator Joel Jolayemi, Dr. Sarah Martinez-Sepanski, Senator Carrie McCleese, Megan O’Neil, Dr. Angela Paez, Senator Nsoki Phambu, Senator Senator Sean Posey, Senator Ljerka Rasmussen, Dr. Achintya Ray, Senator Twianie Roberts, Senator Brian Russell, Senator Miranda Sanford-Terry, Senator Alex Sekwat, Senator Hongwei Si, Dr. Karen Smith, Senator Martene Stanberry, Dr. Megan Streams, and Senator Artenzia Yiung-Seigler

Meeting started at 2:40 PM

AGENDA:

Welcome & Call to Order

Senator Tiriveedhi addressed the Faculty Senate and shared the meeting agenda. The meeting was called to order at 2:45 PM. He asked the senators to text Senator Guha if they were in attendance and raise their hands for any questions.

Office of Academic Affairs · Dr. Robbie Melton Provost and Interim Vice-President, Academic Affairs

The university is in a state of financial crisis. Provost Melton will copy the Deans and Chairs on any information she receives and get the information out ASAP. Provost Melton has been given the responsibility of overseeing retention and graduation. The graduation rate is 32%, which is unacceptable. The Provost has a strategic plan of different activities to increase the graduation rate.

1. The Provost takes ownership in terms of attendance – there was a system problem. The adjunct instructors cannot post attendance until they sign their contracts.

2. Midterm – students are getting aligned with their academic coaches. There is a new plan for advising that the Provost will take about at the next faculty senate meeting. The plan is the streamline advising – some other HBCUs have it. Looking at bridging first year advising. An academic coach is named Student Success Specialist. This Fall 6300 students are enrolled when the projected enrollment was 8500.
3. We have several freshman students without 15 credit hours. One-week courses will be offered during Xtreme Winter and Spring to get those students back on course.

Along with these, the administration is also trying to address salary issues. There was a workforce adjustment of staff, but that did not impact faculty.

Senator Young-Seigler asked how faculty reporting of student's grades affects their financial aid. Provost Melton mentioned that it is unacceptable if faculty don't post grades on time. The Provost is responsible for overseeing Degree Works and CPoS.

Senator Bill Johnson asked the Provost to talk more about what was going on with the restrictions. The Provost mentioned that Academic Affairs is looking into all units to see how they were align with enrollment. They were able to streamline looking at administrative structure and enrollment across semesters and trying to determine how they can maximize resources and reduce duplication. The Deans will be giving reports to Academic Affairs in November. Senator Bill Johnson asked if it included combining departments and mentioned that faculty were not aware of the metrics to make informed decisions. He also asked if the Faculty Senate Executive Committee can receive a summary of the report. The Provost replied that copies will be given to The Faculty Senate Chair and the Chairs Council. The Provost plans to visit each department individually to get input from each department. Provost Melton and Dr. Golman are looking for ways to provide more support to the students.

Office of Student Affairs · Dr. Bridgett Golman, Interim Vice-President, Student Affairs

The Office of Student Affairs is working to get things realigned for faculty and staff. Dr. Golman is the Interim VP of Student Affairs (enrollment services). She oversees residence life, veteran affairs, recruitment, campus tour, records, student life, SGA, student conduct, campus center, admissions, cheerleading and band, but not financial aid.

The Office of Student Affairs is facing financial challenges. Student progression and retention are very important. Major changes are being made in enrollment management and admission. We no longer have First Year Experience. There has been a reduction in the number of temporary contracts and individuals doing work remotely have been realigned. Now we have Navigation1Stop, instead of Customer Relations Office. Student recruitment efforts are being realigned. There are 30 people in that area. Provost Melton mentioned combining undergraduate, graduate, and international students together in terms of a recruiting model. Senator Bill Johnson

stated that University of Memphis has recruitment dashboard that goes live daily and encouraged the Office of Academic Affairs to do something similar.

Dr. Golman also stated that right now we have a major challenge in communication. There is a One Stop Center that will be able to resolve student concerns. There are 6 individuals working through a training schedule. Student Affairs is looking at Title III dollars to find them space.

Currently there is a search for VP of Enrollment Management, and hopefully the successful candidate will be on board by January 2025 and use their expertise to implement a recruitment plan. Dr. Golman is Chair of the Search Committee, but she is not the person who writes the recruitment plan. The goal is to remove barriers that keep students from moving forward.

Dr. Golman also mentioned that in-state students get in-state tuition rates and 250 mile radius rate. Office of Student Affairs is trying to help out of state students who have balances to be in school. We have to do a better job of marketing and rebranding.

Faculty Trustee Report · Dr. Young-Seigler; Faculty Trustee

Senator Artenzia Young-Seigler mentioned that if senators had questions for the President/administration but don't feel comfortable to ask directly, they should send their questions to Senator Youn-Seigler or Senator Tiriveedhi, who will ensure that they are addressed. There is a new Trustee – Demetria Smith-Knight who has replaced Kevin Williams. Ms. Smith-Knight has her own accounting firm in Murfreesboro.

Faculty should tune in to the next Board of Trustees meeting. We are in a financial crisis and outspending our revenue. We have been asked to cut back and be on a spending freeze except for essential personnel.

Committee Reports · Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senate Chair

Senator Chilton (Professional Development) – the committee will talk more about professional development in Spring and present research on interdisciplinary topics. Senator Tiriveedhi suggested talking to Dr. Phambu, Chair of the Research Committee.

Senator Huskey (Library Committee) – asked who the members of the committee were. The names should be sent to Senator Huskey. She mentioned that the library had to cut down databases that were not being used and urged faculty to use any databases they need. Senator Huskey mentioned that we get some funds through state organizations and there is some grant funding.

Senator Ghosh (Academic Committee) – this committee is in the process of getting an updated list of senators.

Benefits Committee (Senator Cynthia George) – some Benefits Committee members could roll over to the Fair Funding Act Committee.

Other concerns · Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senate Chair

1. Faculty across campus are concerned about the financial status of TSU and there is a rumor that TSU will be filing for financial exigency.
2. Tenure-track faculty are anxious about the financial situation, as they are on a year-to-year contract. They are worried about the possibility of job loss.

Senator Tiriveedhi posed these concerns/questions to the President, who stated that points 1 and 2 were rumors. The Financial Action Plan is the only working plan for the TSU administration, which was put out.

3. Do we have to worry about payroll?

The President answered that currently the adjusted financial statements will be available in the next 2 weeks and if anything come out, it will be discussed with faculty.

Senator Tiriveedhi asked the faculty to help stop unnecessary rumors spreading around. Adjunct faculty will be hired on an as needed basis. There will be no faculty job loss. We have to enhance our image. There is a lot of unnecessary negativity on campus. The message from the President is “do more to be more.”

Senator Tiriveedhi also mentioned that we will get new committee members and that all committees are at least 6 years old.

There was a complaint that tenure-track faculty members are not appropriately represented in committees. This discussion will continue in the next meeting. In the next 2 weeks, Senator Tiriveedhi will email the chairs of the committees.

Closing Comments and Adjournment · Senator Venkataswarup Tiriveedhi, Senate Chair

The next Faculty Senate meeting will be held on November 21, 2024.

Meeting adjourned at 4:40 PM.

Minutes recorded by Senator Sujata Guha, Secretary