

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MINUTES

February 16, 2024  
Johnson City, Tennessee

The East Tennessee State University Board of Trustees met on Friday, February 16, 2024, at 1:30 p.m. in the East Tennessee Room of the D.P. Culp Student Center. The meeting was also live-streamed and recorded.

**I. Call to Order**

Board Chair Dr. Linda Latimer called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

Chair Latimer opened the meeting by congratulating Trustee Tony Treadway, whose appointment to the ETSU Board of Trustees was recently confirmed by members of the Tennessee General Assembly's House and Senate Education committees.

Chair Latimer reported on several achievements that have transpired at ETSU since the board last met in November of 2023. Among them:

- ETSU recently reported a record high in annual research and sponsored program funding, reaching \$70.4 million for the last fiscal year.
- ETSU's College of Business and Technology recently introduced the area's "Economic Update," which is published quarterly and provides critical insights into regional and state economic trends.
- The Gatton College of Pharmacy now ranks in the upper echelon of pharmacy schools nationwide. The class of 2023 achieved a 95.4% first-time pass rate on the NAPLEX examination, eclipsing the national average pass rate of 78.6%. ETSU's pass rate was second in the nation among accredited pharmacy schools. Chair Latimer reiterated the board's appreciation to the members of the Tennessee General Assembly for providing public funding for Gatton for the very first time this past year.
- The annual Festival of Ideas will host best-selling authors Mitch Albom and Piper Kerman.

**II. Roll Call**

Board Secretary Dr. Adam Green led the roll call.

Trustees physically present were:

Trustee Charles Allen  
Trustee Steve DeCarlo  
Trustee Dr. Steph Frye-Clark  
Trustee Dorothy Grisham  
Trustee Ron Ramsey  
Trustee Melissa Steagall-Jones  
Trustee Tony Treadway  
Board Chair Dr. Linda Latimer

Dr. Green informed the board chair that a quorum was present.

### **III. Public Comments**

No individuals were signed up to speak to the board during the public comment period.

### **IV. Approval of Minutes from November 17, 2023**

The minutes from the November 17, 2023, meeting of the Board of Trustees were approved as submitted, with Trustee Charles Allen making the motion to approve and Trustee Dorothy Grisham seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

### **V. Report from the Academic, Research, and Student Success Committee**

Representing Committee Chair Janet Ayers, Trustee Charles Allen reported on behalf of the Academic, Research, and Student Success Committee. He indicated that there were two action items before the committee and that both were approved. The first was the General Education Redesign proposal, and the second was the approval of the academic calendars for the years 2026-2027, 2027-2028, and 2028-2029.

Trustee Allen reported that the committee heard three information items: notification of curriculum items moving through the academic approval process for the period August 1, 2023, through December 31, 2023; a summary of the annual institutional review for Graduate Medical Education; and an update on strategic initiatives related to synthetic biology.

### **VI. Report from the Finance and Administration Committee**

Committee Chair Steve DeCarlo provided a summary of the Finance and Administration Committee's meeting which took place earlier that morning. Among the highlights of the report:

- The committee approved a zero percent increase for the 2024-25 academic year tuition for the College of Medicine.
- The committee approved the Housing and Food Services rates for fall 2024 (included in the board’s consent agenda).
  - The proposed increase for housing ranges from 5.2 percent to 11.2 percent to support facilities maintenance, inflationary operating costs, and debt service.
  - The university is requesting a 5.1 percent, or \$100 per semester, increase in the Silver meal plan, with similar increases in other plans. The payments for the plans to the vendor will increase by 5.3 percent per the contract.
- As informational items, the committee reviewed the criteria for consideration of a tuition and mandatory fee increase, comparative tuition and mandatory fee information for all the public universities in Tennessee, second quarter agreements exceeding \$250,000, and a brief update on the transition to Oracle, as well as the budget model redesign.
- The Tennessee Higher Education Commission has proposed a zero percent to 4 percent tuition and mandatory fee increase range for in-state undergraduate students. For budget development purposes, the university is considering a 4 percent increase in tuition and mandatory fees.
- The committee discussed the salary pools in Governor Bill Lee’s proposed budget. The campus could receive \$2.7 million in salary improvement funding from the state if the proposed budget is approved. To meet Governor Lee’s recommendation of a 3 percent salary increase for state employees, an additional \$2.2 million would have to be funded by a tuition increase, enrollment growth, or reallocation of other expenditures or appropriation dollars.
- The committee received a quarterly financial update comparing operating revenues and expenditures from the current year to the prior year.

**VII. Report from the Audit Committee**

Trustee Steagall-Jones reported that the committee had one action item: a revision to the FY24 Audit Plan. Two items were added to the plan, and three were removed.

As an information item, the Recommendation Log Status as of January 31, 2024, was reviewed, and Trustee Steagall-Jones indicated that there were no audits completed since the last board meeting, although several are expected to be done by the next board meeting.

Trustee Steagall-Jones reported that the committee was given a summary of ETSU's annual Public Safety and Clery Report. Statistics in the report show that crime on the ETSU campus did not increase for 2022.

Chair Steagall-Jones reported that the Audit Committee then went into executive session.

### **VIII. Consent Agenda**

With no requests for any items to be pulled from the consent agenda for discussion and consideration by the full board, the Board of Trustees approved the consent agenda with a motion from Trustee Steagall-Jones, seconded by Trustee Grisham. The motion passed unanimously.

### **IX. Impact of TRIO Programs in the Region**

Dr. Ronnie Gross, Director of ETSU's TRIO Programs, provided an overview of TRIO programs: federally-funded programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals who are low-income and first-generation. He said two-thirds of the students in ETSU's programs fit into those categories. TRIO has seven programs, and these are pipelines for students in middle school, high school, and college, as well as adults and veterans. Dr. Gross told the board that ETSU's TRIO programs are among the best known in the country.

Dr. Gross reported that since 1989, more than \$59 million in funding has come to the university's TRIO Programs, allowing us to serve almost 52,000 people. Currently, we serve 2,400 people in Northeast Tennessee. In Upward Bound, we serve 12 high schools. We also serve 1,000 adults per year in the Educational Opportunity Center program.

Dr. Gross indicated that ETSU's Veterans Upward Bound program is one of 60 in the country, and we work with 125 veterans per year to help prepare them for college. Aspiring doctoral students, some 29 in number, are served through the Ronald McNair Program. Dr. Gross pointed to several measures of success of our TRIO programs:

- For 2022-23, 73 percent of our Talent Search students enrolled in post-secondary education;
- 57 percent of our 2017 cohort of Upward Bound students finished bachelor's degrees within six years;
- 75 percent of our Educational Opportunity Center participants earned secondary school diplomas or equivalents;
- 89 percent of our Veterans Upward Bound completers enrolled in post-secondary education.

Dr. Gross then introduced Holland Boyd, a veteran and a sophomore at ETSU studying finance. He described his rewarding experiences with Veterans Upward Bound and TRIO Support Services and how they have led to his academic success. Dr. Gross then introduced Stephen Hendrix, who teaches in the Department of Computing in the College of Business and Technology at ETSU and is Past President of the ETSU Faculty Senate. In addition, Mr. Hendrix is a County Commissioner in Unicoi County. He is an alumnus of ETSU's Upward Bound program and a first-generation college student. He spoke to the board about the "tremendous impact" that Upward Bound has had on his life since his acceptance into the program in the fall of 1995.

## **X. President's Report**

President Noland opened his presentation by noting that the best representation of the mission of ETSU was shown during the previous agenda item when an individual who came here in 1989 has brought \$59 million in federal support to the university—support that not only impacts ETSU but also the lives of families and is life-changing.

Dr. Noland reviewed the strategic plan that the Board of Trustees established when it moved through the implementation of the Committee for 125, Chapter II. One of those strategic planning elements is access and success. In that light, President Noland provided an update on spring 2024 enrollment, which is up year over year at all levels: undergraduate (+158), graduate (+10), and total (+168). Undergraduate enrollment is not only up, he said, it increased in key areas such as the number of transfer students and the number of new students starting as freshmen, as well as a significant increase in the number of students returning fall to spring. Fall to spring retention is now back up to where we were prior to COVID, a clear sign that retention is moving in the right direction.

Looking ahead to the fall 2024 semester, Dr. Noland reported that we are seeing the largest number of applications to the university at this point in time in our history: 13,418. If trends continue, we expect a minimum of 2,100 new freshmen going into the fall.

Dr. Noland then referenced national statistics prepared by the consulting firm EAB, which show that institutions, on average, that are experiencing enrollment growth are large public institutions or elite ones, while most of the country's regional universities are experiencing enrollment declines. Dr. Noland noted that ETSU's numbers are different, however, because of the plan our Enrollment Services unit has put in place from a recruitment perspective and because of changes in institutional culture. President Noland said ETSU's goal is to sustain this growth, and he underscored the fact that what is happening at ETSU is generally not happening at other regional universities across the nation.

Moving to operational sustainability, another strategic planning pillar, Dr. Noland shared with the board the state's operating budget recommendation for the campus, included in Governor Bill Lee's budget. He emphasized that we are fortunate since the number includes new

operating revenues, but he added that this number does not include any salary enhancement money. There is approximately \$1.2 million to cover increased costs related to inflation. President Noland stressed that we are in a state where investing in higher education is valued. At the same time, looking forward, he added that we have to be prepared to adjust the way we are structured and how we operate, as we are currently doing with the creation of a new college structure and the implementation of a new ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) system that will allow us to do more with less.

Dr. Noland then reviewed the Tennessee Higher Education Commission's (THEC's) recommendation on capital funding. He told the board that Governor Lee funded one project on this list, which was ranked at number-six on the THEC list: the Fletcher Hall addition and renovation at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. ETSU's Brown Hall Phase II project is number three on the list this year, after having been number one last year. Dr. Noland expressed confidence that this project will be funded, with the help of our Northeast Tennessee legislative delegation. Meanwhile, the lease of the Downtown Johnson City facility has been completed, which will provide surge support, including lab spaces, during Brown Hall renovations. Dr. Noland reported that Burleson Hall renovations are underway and that by the next board meeting in May, board members will be able to see the steel exoskeleton of the new academic building. In addition, University Commons is being expanded. Dr. Noland indicated that the 10-year strategic facilities master plan will come before the board later this year.

Dr. Noland expressed thanks to the members of the Tennessee General Assembly for the \$1.2 million Higher Education Safety Grant that ETSU has just received from the state Department of Finance and Administration.

Dr. Noland summarized progress toward Voyager implementation and the testing and training that needs to be done between now and the July 1 implementation date. He spoke of the vast improvements the new system will bring in the university's classification and compensation structure. It will be a simplified structure with broader pay ranges, giving supervisors greater latitude with regard to compensation. Dr. Noland thanked Lori Erickson and her staff in Human Resources for their work in making sure the new job families and position grades that have been assigned are appropriate. He added that there is no new revenue to pay for the changes in job families or compensation. Over the course of the next three to five years, Dr. Noland said that we will implement pay adjustments to meet the new ranges in the system, as we identify existing resources to address salary increases. He emphasized that the number one strategic priority as we look for efficiencies across the campus is to reinvest in our people.

In discussing the importance of regional data, Dr. Noland thanked Dr. Joe Chappell, Assistant Vice Provost of Institutional Research, describing him as a national leader in his field. Dr. Noland explained that the State Higher Education Executive Officers organization is exploring return on investment and employment outcomes. SHEEO, he said, has created Communities of Practice that provide this kind of information, from a research perspective. Dr. Noland told the board that among the participants in Tennessee are the Tennessee Higher Education

Commission, the Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration, the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and only one university, ETSU, thanks to the work of Dr. Chappell, who has also been selected as a summer fellow at Harvard. Dr. Noland added that through the work of Dr. Chappell, we will be able soon to provide very detailed information about ETSU graduates once they complete their studies.

Dr. Noland discussed several other strategic initiatives. The Strategic Enrollment Management Task Force is an ongoing effort to ensure that our enrollment efforts are cutting edge. He thanked the Board of Trustees for approving the work of the General Education Committee, as we make sure our curricula remain relevant. The report of the Academic Restructuring Task Force has been out for public comment and feedback, and the President and Provost will soon provide their recommendation to the campus. The administration will receive feedback throughout the spring and will hold a series of town hall meetings. A final recommendation will come before the Board of Trustees in May. Dr. Noland reported that the redesign of our budget model is progressing, but that work will take approximately a year and a half, as we move away from a decentralized model toward a simpler one.

Looking to the months ahead, Dr. Noland highlighted the upcoming Festival of Ideas, which will feature authors Mitch Albom and Piper Kerman, and he commented on the success of the Broadway productions at the Martin Center.

As an example of Trustees being involved in the life of the campus, President Noland thanked Trustee Melissa Steagall-Jones for her work as a member of the selection committee for the Roan Scholars Leadership Program. President Noland recalled the late Louis Gump, founder of the program, and his goal of seeing it grow. This fall, ETSU will accept 11 students into the program.

#### **XI. Other Business**

There was no additional business to come before the board.

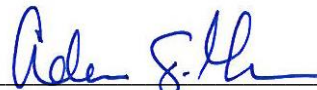
#### **XII. Executive Session**

There was no need for an executive session.

#### **XIII. Adjournment**

Trustee Ramsey moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Adam Green  
Secretary of the Board of Trustees