

University Council
December 8, 2025
Zoom

1. Call to Order

Dr. Rob Pack called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

2. Roll Call

Melissa Nipper led the roll call. Members present were: Ms. Bridget Baird, Dr. Ginni Blackhart, Dr. Debbie Byrd, Dr. Dena Evans, Dr. Joel Faidley, Mr. David Finney, Dr. Adam Green, Dr. Nick Hagemeier, Dr. Mike Hoff, Dr. Keith Johnson, Dr. Chris Keller, Ms. Shelby Koerten, Ms. Tricia Korade, Dr. Dhirendra Kumar, Dr. Sam Mayhew, Mr. Cody Morelock, Dr. Rob Pack, Dr. Tony Pittarese, Mr. Jeremy Ross, Dr. Joe Sherlin, Dr. Alan Stevens, Dr. Sarah Thomason, and Ms. Jess Vodden.

3. Standing Items

3.1 Approve Minutes of the November 10, 2025, meeting.

A motion was made to approve the minutes from the November 10, 2025, meeting. The motion was seconded; the minutes were approved.

3.2 Review Agenda

3.3 Consent Agenda Items

A motion was made to approve the policies on the consent agenda (noted below). The motion was seconded and approved.

3.3.1 Chemical Hazard Communication

3.3.2 Computer, Software, and IT Product and Service Standards

3.4 Sub-Council on University Governance Organizations

Dr. Ginni Blackhart provided an overview of reports from several university governance committees for the 2024-25 academic year, highlighting a very active year overall. Key accomplishments included approval of 174 undergraduate curriculum proposals, major policy actions supporting veterans and military students, funding of nine sustainability projects, and extensive safety planning focused on access control and security upgrades. Other committees addressed ongoing challenges such as the uncertainty of collegiate athletics and reviewed over 3,000 scholarship applications, identifying priorities for continued work in the coming year.

3.5 Call for Voluntary Reports of UC-Essential Action Items from Governance Organizations

Staff Senate: Mr. Cody Morelock reported that the Staff Senate completed the Season of Sharing holiday drive and served 79 families this year, 19 more than last year. They were prepared to serve 90 families, and the remaining items were sent to Bucky's Food Pantry to support students who will remain on campus during the holiday closure.

Faculty Senate: Dr. Alan Stevens reported that the Faculty Senate is preparing to send a faculty-to-faculty survey in spring 2026.

SGA: Ms. Shelby Koerten reported that the Student Government Association held its last Senate meeting of the semester, with several junior senators passing their first pieces of legislation. The legislation encompasses a range of areas, from transportation to the VA campus to enhancing safety on campus.

4. Action Items

4.1 Old Business

There was no old business to come before the council.

4.2 New Business

There was no new business to come before the council.

5. Information Items/Presentations

5.1 Web Strategy Redesign

Ms. Jess Vodden and Ms. Amerrica Duggan-Torbert from the Office of University Marketing and Communications presented a comprehensive plan to redesign ETSU's website, citing outdated technology, accessibility risks, content redundancy, and reputational concerns as key drivers for change.

The website was described as the university's primary communications and marketing tool, currently overly focused on internal audiences, with more than 40,000 pages, 600 editors, and limited publishing controls. They proposed a 36-month project to develop a new web strategy, implement a modern CMS and tech stack, clean and optimize content, and migrate to a more user-focused, accessible, and secure platform, with an estimated one-time cost of over \$1 million and an annual recurring cost of about \$50,000.

The redesign will focus on external audiences, use clearer language, improve navigation, optimize for SEO and AI, and implement a subdomain structure that enables phased rollouts and tailored user experiences. The project will include reduced numbers of trained web editors, stronger governance, cloud hosting, and form-based content updates to streamline maintenance. Next steps include hiring a consultant and temporary project staff, conducting campus and student research, prioritizing admissions and student-focused content, and engaging campus units through designated unit leads and ongoing stakeholder feedback.

5.1 Gear Up Overview

Dr. Ronnie Gross presented an overview of the ETSU GEAR UP Partnership, a federally funded initiative designed to help middle and high school students in Northeast Tennessee envision and pursue postsecondary education.

The program will serve current 6th and 7th graders in Carter, Hawkins, Johnson, Sullivan, and Washington counties, as well as Kingsport City Schools, focusing on low-income, first-generation, and underserved students. GEAR UP uses the Think–Know–Act–Go framework to support academic performance, college and career readiness, family engagement, and educator professional development.

The seven-year grant totals more than \$29 million, making it one of the most significant grants in ETSU's history, and is supported by extensive regional partnerships with school systems, higher education institutions, businesses, and community organizations. ETSU is one of only five institutions nationally to host all federal TRIO programs alongside GEAR UP, collectively serving more than 7,500 individuals in the region. Implementation is underway, including hiring site coordinators, establishing advisory and evaluation structures, and launching coordinated communications and outreach efforts.

7. Announcements

There were no announcements.

8. Adjournment

Dr. Robert Pack adjourned the meeting at 9:33 a.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for January 12, 2026, at 8:30 a.m.