University Council
August 10, 2026

1. Call to Order

Dr. Kimberly D. McCorkle called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. She welcomed the Council and introduced a special presentation concerning the periodic review of the President.

2. Special Presentation

Dr. Adam Green introduced Dr. Matt Ceppi, Vice President for Strategic Development and Managing Director of AASCU Consulting, who presented the results of the recent 360-degree assessment conducted as part of the periodic review of ETSU President Dr. Brian Noland. Dr. Green noted that 47 individuals, including University Council members, academic deans, and members of the Board of Trustees, were invited to participate. The assessment was confidential.

Dr. Ceppi explained that the assessment incorporated quantitative ratings and qualitative comments from multiple stakeholder groups. The assessment included 39 competencies across four areas: leadership, administration and management, human relations, and self-awareness. Thirty-four of the 47 invited raters responded, resulting in a 72 percent response rate.

Dr. Ceppi characterized the assessment as highly positive and described it as one of the most positive evaluations he had personally conducted. He identified President Noland's strongest competencies as external advocacy and representation of the university; sustaining a collegial and civil campus environment; providing passionate and effective leadership; and cultivating donor and alumni relationships. Comments also emphasized the President's calm, thoughtful approach; trusted relationships; ability to articulate a vision and build buy-in; and effectiveness as an ambassador for the university.

Dr. Ceppi noted several opportunities for continued development, including work-life balance, senior team development, decision-making speed, accountability, conflict management, leadership evaluation, goal clarity, and ensuring that the senior leadership team communicates with one voice. He emphasized that these were opportunities for continued growth rather than significant risks.

Dr. Ceppi concluded that the assessment reflected an exceptional leader who is working to advance the mission of East Tennessee State University and that the institution has flourished under President Noland's leadership. No questions were raised by Council members.

President Noland was not present for the presentation to allow the Council to hear the assessment and discuss it openly.

3. Roll Call

Ms. Claire Shoun led the roll call. Members present were: Ms. Bridget Baird, Dr. Kate Beatty, Dr. Brian Bennett, Dr. Joe Bidwell, Dr. Debbie Byrd, Dr. Cheri Clavier, Ms. Christy Graham, Dr. Adam Green, Dr. Nick Hagemeier, Dr. Mike Hoff, Dr. Keith Johnson, Ms. Myra Jones, Dr. Sam Mayhew, Dr. Kimberly D. McCorkle, Mr. Cody Morelock, Ms. Melissa Nipper, Dr. Brian Noland, Dr. Tony Pittarese, Mr. Howard Reddy, Mr. Jeremy Ross, Dr. Richard Sander, Dr. Joe Sherlin, Dr. Jeff Snodgrass, Dr. Alan Stevens, and Dr. Sarah Thomason.

4. Standing Items

4.1 Approve Minutes of the July 13, 2026, meeting.

A motion was made to approve the minutes from the July 13, 2026, meeting. The motion was seconded. No edits or additions were requested, and the Council approved the minutes.

4.2 Review Agenda

The agenda was reviewed, and the Council proceeded with the scheduled items.

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

Faculty Senate: Dr. Alan Stevens reported that Faculty Senate is preparing for the start of the semester. Faculty Senate is taking a larger role in new faculty orientation and onboarding, providing additional opportunities to introduce new faculty to campus resources and opportunities for committee service. Dr. Stevens noted that this was his final University Council meeting as Faculty Senate President and that Dr. Kate Beatty will assume the role.

Staff Senate: Mr. Cody Morelock reported that Staff Senate completed its general senate elections at the end of July, electing 16 senators, seven of whom were reelected to their positions. New senators will be onboarded during the August and September meetings. Nominations for the Senate Executive Committee will occur in the August Meeting, with elections completed within the week. Once elections are completed, an update on the new senators and executive team will follow.

Council of Academic Chairs: Dr. Sarah Thomason reported that the Council of Academic Chairs, in partnership with the Provost's Office, is implementing a monthly comprehensive chair-development program based on a spring needs assessment. The first session, scheduled for August 27, will focus on developing department-level promotion and tenure guidelines. Deans and other leaders were encouraged to prioritize participation. The Council continues to participate in the Policy Implementation Workgroup and other university committees and is working with associate deans to develop a comprehensive periodic review policy and procedure for department chairs.

Student Government Association: No report was presented. Dr. Joe Sherlin announced that the SGA will be attending a retreat August 12 and 13 in Sevierville and thanked those participating.

Athletics: Dr. Richard Sander reported that the first home football game is scheduled for August 29 against Campbell, with the first athletic competition of the year being women's soccer against North Alabama on August 11. He also discussed recent NCAA eligibility changes establishing a five-year period in which student-athletes may compete. He noted ongoing litigation concerning transitional eligibility for students in the preceding class and the resulting uncertainty for athletics programs.

Information Technology Services: Ms. Myra Jones reported that classroom technology upgrades were being completed in Roger Stout Hall, Sam Wilson Hall, Nicks Hall, Warf Pickel, and VA7, including Crestron systems, cameras, and audio upgrades. Lab computers were also being installed, and 136 student computers in the new academic building were ready for use, with remaining classroom technology work expected to be completed before the fall semester. Ms. Jones reminded the campus community to remain vigilant about phishing and other cybersecurity threats, noting 48 compromised accounts to date, including 22 student accounts. Cybersecurity awareness training for new employees includes information about AI and phishing.

5. Action Items

5.1 Old Business

There was no old business to come before the council.

5.2 New Business

5.2.1 Review of ETSU Mission Profile and Approval of Proposed Changes

Dr. Mike Hoff presented proposed updates to ETSU's mission profile. He explained that the mission profile is an important statement of how the university is represented to the state and the citizens of Tennessee and is relevant to the university's authority to offer academic programs. He noted that the profile also shapes how external audiences understand the institution, including potential donors and grant partners.

Dr. Hoff explained that the proposed revisions reflect ETSU's Carnegie classification and describe the institution as a professions-focused institution with undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral education and an elective classification for community engagement. He noted that the mission profile has remained largely unchanged since the implementation of the FOCUS Act in 2017, while ETSU's research profile, hiring, academic portfolio, and governance have evolved.

Dr. Hoff emphasized the importance of ensuring that the mission profile accurately reflects the institution as academic program approval and review processes continue to change. He expressed interest in using the coming year for a broader discussion about whether the language continues to describe ETSU as intended.

A motion was made to approve the proposed updates to the ETSU mission profile. The motion was seconded. There was no further discussion, and the motion was approved. The revised mission profile will proceed to the Board of Trustees.

6. Information Items/Presentations

6.1 Website Redesign Project Update: Ms. Melissa Nipper and Ms. Amerrica Duggan-Torbert

Amerrica Duggan-Torbert, Web Strategy Manager, presented an update on ETSU's three-year website redesign project. She explained that the project is intended to comprehensively overhaul the university website, including its policies, content, structure, and alignment with brand messaging, with a primary focus on prospective and current students.

The redesign is intended to improve the external user experience, strengthen digital accessibility, support personalization, and ensure accurate, current university information is available to users and AI systems that draw information from the web. Internally, the new platform will use structured content and a single source of truth so information can be updated once and reflected across the site.

The project team has reviewed approximately 30,000 web pages and is currently establishing the site's overall information architecture. Phase 1 will focus on the homepage and other high-visibility landing pages, including the homepage, program finder, research, Trailblazers, general ETSU information, applying, campus life, and migration of the Rhodes Scholars and ETSU News sites. Phase 1 will begin in 2027 and will expand to selected priority program pages, the Academic Health Sciences Center, student support, community-engaged learning, undergraduate and graduate admissions, and remaining program landing pages.

The project team will work with designated unit web leads, with one lead identified for each unit or college to coordinate information and feedback. Cabinet members and deans were asked to identify their unit web leads by August 15. Campus web editors were encouraged to clean, consolidate, archive, and delete outdated or unnecessary content. Historically significant material that no longer needs to remain on the public website may be preserved through Digital Commons.

The new website will be built on Drupal and is intended to make routine content updates substantially easier for web editors. The team is continuing to evaluate how internal content should be handled; until a longer-term intranet solution is determined, appropriate internal content may be placed behind password protection. Questions and project updates will be addressed through the website redesign project webpage and ongoing campus communications.

6.2 Duration of Status (D/S) Process Update: Mr. Caleb Bennett

Caleb Bennett provided an update on federal changes to the Duration of Status process for international students. The changes are scheduled to take effect on September 15, following publication of the federal rule on July 17 and a 60-day implementation period.

Under the new process, international students will receive fixed end dates on their I-94 records rather than remaining in the United States for the duration of their status. The presentation indicated four years for bachelor's students, two years for master's students, and four years for doctoral programs. Extensions that previously could be processed through the university's international office will instead require an application through the federal government.

The grace period following completion of a program will decrease from 60 days to 30 days. The presentation also addressed restrictions on changes of major and transfers, including restrictions on undergraduate major changes during the first year and limitations affecting graduate students. Lateral or reverse matriculation will no longer be permitted. Denial of a federal extension request could require immediate departure.

Current international students will not automatically receive a fixed date unless they depart and re-enter the United States after September 15, although they will be subject to the applicable degree timelines. The university is developing procedures, recommendations, website updates, and training to help students and employees understand the new requirements. The International Office is working with graduate coordinators, athletics, advisors, Student Success and Retention, and other campus groups to identify impacts and develop consistent guidance.

The discussion highlighted several unresolved questions, including the timing and standards for federal extension decisions, responsibility for extension fees, institutional liability when an error contributes to a student's status issue, and the potential effect on student-athletes. University leaders were encouraged to become familiar with the new requirements because advising decisions may have significant immigration consequences. The International Office is also reviewing staffing needs and processes in light of the increased monitoring, training, and compliance responsibilities.

6.3 Strategic Agenda Update: Dr. Mike Hoff

Dr. Mike Hoff provided an update on the university's strategic agenda. He reviewed the distinction among strategic planning at the institutional level, operational planning at the divisional and departmental levels, and tactical action steps, policies, and procedures.

Dr. Hoff emphasized that the university's strategic work should remain grounded in the public purpose of higher education and ETSU's mission of improving lives through service to the region. He reviewed changes in the Tennessee Higher Education Commission's strategic direction and performance funding model, including greater emphasis on four-year graduation, program quality, major field tests and licensure, and student engagement.

The Council discussed the relationship between the strategic agenda and ETSU's long-term strategic plan, including ETSU 125, Chapter II. Dr. Hoff noted that the objectives contained in the longer-term plan remain important priorities while the strategic agenda provides a broader framework for current work. Colleges developing strategic plans were encouraged to use both documents and to identify additional initiatives that would advance the university's vision.

The discussion also addressed Performance Funding changes and the implementation of scores based on Program Quality, Student Success (MFT/Licensure), and Student Engagement. Dr. Hoff identified current strategic priorities including access and success, enrollment management, academic portfolio development, teaching excellence, empowered employees, research and innovation, community stewardship, fiscal sustainability, and operational excellence. He emphasized that the university will need to formalize governance structures, continue implementing the strategic agenda, accelerate work on enrollment management, and engage in strategic discussions on tactics and alignment.

7. President's Report

President Brian Noland thanked Council members for participating in the presidential 360 assessment and explained that he had intentionally been absent during the presentation to allow for open discussion. He noted that the assessment materials will be shared with the Board of Trustees and incorporated into the formal presidential evaluation.

President Noland announced that Rebecca Tolene has been selected as ETSU's next General Counsel, with a start date of October 1. He thanked the legal staff and Kay Lennon-McGrew for their work during the transition. He also reported that the marketing and communications leadership search is underway, with WhittKiefer serving as consultant and Dr. Adam Green as chair. The anticipated goal is to have a permanent leader in place by January 1. He thanked Melissa Nipper and her staff for their work during that time.

President Noland reviewed several upcoming fall events, including the New Faculty Reception, Move-in Day, Preview kickoff, Faculty Convocation, the ribbon-cutting for the new academic building, Student Convocation, the ETSU Foundation meeting, the ribbon-cutting for the new pickleball court, and the August 29 home football game against Campbell.

Using an endangered plant native to the Roan Mountain region, the Gray's lily, as an analogy, President Noland described ETSU as a distinctive institution rooted in the region that requires stewardship, care, and patience. He emphasized the university's strong mission, distinctive academic programs, improving retention and graduation rates, strong enrollment and finances, and the importance of protecting and cultivating these strengths amid a rapidly changing higher education environment.

President Noland highlighted the need for open communication and shared governance as the university responds to changes involving international student requirements, federal financial aid, state policy, athletics, and major technology implementations. He expressed confidence that the university can continue to move forward successfully by working together and remaining focused on students and the institution's mission.

8. Announcements

Dr. Sam Mayhew reminded the Council that the drop-for-nonpayment deadline is Tuesday at 6:00 a.m. and move-in day is scheduled for Wednesday, August 19. He noted that approximately 125 students had already moved into campus housing and approximately 300 additional students were expected to move in during the current week.

No additional announcements were presented.

9. Adjournment

Provost McCorkle adjourned the meeting at 10:12 a.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for September 14, 2026, at 8:30 a.m. in the Culp East Tennessee Room.