

Staff Advisory Committee
September 16, 2025 – 1:30 p.m.

Members Present: Brian Allen, Christa Blair, Jennifer Dewar, Emily Disbrow, Ashton Estes, Jennifer Goad, Liam Harder, Melanie Mabrey, Tammy Martorana, Irene Mauk, Peggy Nettenstrom, Noel Stojkov, Catherine Warren, Miranda Wilson, Savannah Yarbrough, Deborah Yu

Members Absent: Joyce Arnold-Hesson, Cathleen Walker

Others Present: President Oldham, Lee Wray, Aleta Cannon

Summary:

Approved Agenda

Approved May 8, 2025 minutes

New member introduction

Reviewed Staff Day feedback

Nomination for Vice Chair

Comments by the President

Proceedings:

Chair Melanie Mabrey called the meeting to order at 1:36 pm. Catherine Warren motioned to approve the agenda for September 16, 2025. Jennifer Dewar seconded. Motion APPROVED.

Peggy Nettenstrom motioned to approve the May 8, 2025, minutes. Warren seconded. Motion APPROVED.

Mabrey asked everyone to go around the table and introduce themselves as there were several new members. Mabrey then explained that the Staff Advisory Committee planned and hosted Staff Day each year, typically at the beginning of August. In a future meeting, the Staff Day Planning subcommittee would be established to help plan for next year. She asked if everyone had received the feedback on Staff Day 2025 and if there were any questions. There were none.

Mabrey explained that nominations for a new vice chair were needed. Aleta Cannon noted that members rotating off the committee soon were ineligible, and this included Joyce Arnold-Hesson, Noel Stojkov, Peggy Nettenstrom, Christa Blair, and Jennifer Dewar. New members were welcome to be nominated for the role. Once votes were counted, Deborah Yu held the majority nomination for vice chair and accepted the role.

President Oldham began his comments by explaining that Tennessee Tech's football team's ranking had increased to twelfth in the country, averaging sixty points per game. He thanked everyone on the committee for all they did and noted each person was important to the mission of the University and helping students become successful.

The official numbers on enrollment were in and 2,028 first time freshmen had enrolled, making it the fourth largest freshman class. The average high school grade point average (GPA) of the class was 3.72 and around 37% of the class had a 4.0 GPA in high school. The average ACT score was 24 and there were five National Merit semifinalists in the class. With the freshman class, the total enrollment headcount was 10,701 and was the largest since 2015. Oldham explained that between 2014 to 2021 there had been a decline in enrollment, partially due to the Tennessee Promise community college initiative and other factors. There were 1,200 international students a few years ago and there was currently a population of around 250. In recent years there was an increase in enrollment of around 2.2% per year each year.

The student retention rate for first year freshman was 80% for the first time in history. A table representing the top ten majors on campus was shown for the committee, and they were as follows:

1. Mechanical Engineering with 964 students
2. Computer Science with 762 students
3. Nursing with 884 students
4. Biology with 581 students
5. Exercise Science with 423 students
6. Civil and Environmental Engineering with 387 students
7. Business Management with 358 students
8. Electrical Engineering with 329 students
9. Psychology with 297 students
10. Elementary Education with 254 students.

This was a total of 5,293 students, which represented about half of Tennessee Tech's students. Oldham explained that this showed where Tennessee Tech students saw value and relevance and there was a lot to gain from this information. The U.S. News and World Report rankings had been released, and Tennessee Tech had moved up thirty-one spots in the ranking, up to #257 in the National University category, and around #150 in the Public University category. This ranking focused heavily on graduation rates. Tennessee Tech was typically a few points below where the rankings believed it should be. Oldham noted that this told the University where it could do better and was a valuable lesson, but overall Tennessee Tech was doing very well.

Among Tennessee public universities, Tennessee Tech ranked highly in several categories, and notably as #1 for student loan debt. Oldham felt that the University was undervalued in some ways by people that did not know the University, and so it was important to share the story of Tennessee Tech and what an asset it was to the state of Tennessee. Carnegie data shared by the Provost's Office showed that Tennessee Tech was one of around 127 opportunity universities, which means it was accessible to students for a good education and the value they received in

terms of career salaries after graduation. Carnegie data also compared entry-level Tennessee Tech graduate salaries with local high school graduate entry-level salaries, and it was found that a Tennessee Tech graduate earned 67% more than a high school graduate in the area.

Tennessee Tech would be joining the Southern Conference beginning in 2026. This was a strategic move for the university that would be beneficial for both Athletics and fans, with opportunities for great rivalries. The new football stadium construction was coming along. Groundbreaking for the ACME (Advanced Construction and Manufacturing) building would be on Friday, October 3, 2025. No date was set yet for the JJ Oakley Innovation Residence Hall groundbreaking, but it would likely take place in October or November. Construction would begin at the end of 2025. Other upcoming projects included Wattenbarger Auditorium, the Student Event Center, a Football Operations Center, and a landscape masterplan for campus. Oldham explained that landscaping was often an afterthought in planning processes, but a landscape masterplan would be impactful for future planning and consistency. He commended the Grounds team for all the work they do in tough conditions. There were two newly proposed buildings in Capital Projects: a new Life Sciences building and a new Social Sciences building. Oldham noted there was great momentum for the new academic year and welcomed any questions.

Warren stated she worked with students auditing courses and wanted to increase participation. She had been asked by students in the program why the printing funds and other benefits had been removed from the program and who to contact regarding this. Oldham was unsure why the benefit had been removed. Nettenstrom stated that football game access was linked to the payment of the student access fee, which audit program students did not pay. For the fitness center, students had to be enrolled in at least six credit hours to have free access to the facility. Lee Wray said he would check on this and find an answer.

Liam Harder stated that the Student Success Center in the College of Engineering had recently opened a food pantry and had already had patrons benefit from the service. He asked if there was an update on the stipend to assist with the transition to the new pay frequency. Wray stated that he would check on this with HR. Mabrey asked if the payroll dates for the new pay frequency had been posted and Wray said he would check on this as well.

Cannon updated on Kevin Vedder's behalf since he had to miss the meeting. Vedder had shared that the initial training of Talon for the Business Partner Network had started and would run through mid-October. This would be followed by similar training to be provided to all users of business, finance, and HR processes from mid-October to mid-November, then training for the remainder of campus from November to December.

Irene Mauk motioned to adjourn. Nettenstrom seconded. Adjourned at 2:23 pm.

Aleta Cannon, recorder

Documents on file:

Agenda, September 16, 2025
Minutes, May 8, 2025