

Faculty Senate Meeting with President Oldham

Date: Sept. 15, 2025

Location: In-person in Lab Science Commons Room 1205 and online via Teams

Note: unhighlighted in attendance means the person was present.

Present: M. Allen (Board of Trustees Faculty Rep.), M. Atkinson, J. Baier, C. Brown, W. Carroll, R. Chitiyo, M. Comer, K. Craven, M. Creter, A. Donadio, J. Gannod, K. Grimes, R. Hall, S. Hasan, A. Hill, C. Hill, M. Hu, K. Kennedy, C. Killman, R. LeBorne, J. Mabry, T. Majors, A. Manginelli, D. Mann, M. Nattrass, L. Null, B. O'Connor, M. Olsen, H. Park, M. Rajabali, L.A. Shipley, S. Seiler, T. Smith (nonmember), A. Spears, L. Suters, D. Tennant, T. Timmerman, K. Trent, S. Wendt, B. Wilson, K. Xu

Absent: S. Browning, S. Christen, J. Field, J. Jenkins, A. Kalyanapu, J. Ojo, Y. Peng

Guests: President Oldham, Chief of Staff Lee Wray

1. Call to Order: 3:32 p.m.

Opening comments from Dr. Oldham: The official headcount for this fall is 10,701. We're not satisfied with that, so we are actively and aggressively pursuing opportunities and strategies to get over 11,000 and 12,000. We topped an 80% retention rate for the first time in history. Student success measures are positive. Enrollment continues to increase. There are positives around rankings. U.S. News and World Report rankings are available tomorrow.

2. Parking:

- How does the new digital parking-pass system work, and how does it affect the availability of open parking spaces? What are the steps being taken to ensure the system is fair and consistent and functioning properly? Is there still a plan to build a parking garage?
- **President Oldham:** The questions revolve around the changes to the ticketing system. We have technology now to read the license plates, so parking staff can more frequently and expeditiously drive through and scan license plates, issuing tickets as necessary. The enforcement aspect has seemingly improved. For the 8/21-9/10/2024 period, 574 parking tickets were issued; for the period from 8/21-9/10/2025, there have been 993. There are 125 more gold spaces this year than last year. Revenue from that goes back into parking and paving and support for parking.

- The parking issues on campus are more location-oriented than a lack of actual parking. The westside lots across Willow Avenue have many available spots even during the busiest times. There are still plans for a large parking garage at some point, but funding is an issue. The students had a referendum a year ago about the parking garage and voted not to do it.

3. Shared Governance:

- What are your thoughts on what shared governance and the role of the Faculty Senate on campus looks like? Would you support disbanding the Faculty Senate in favor of using an advisory board as was recently done at Texas State University? Can you give us a recent example of effective shared governance? Have you ever followed the recommendations of the Faculty Senate even if you disagreed?
- **President Oldham:** Dr. Oldham believes we have shared governance; the process just may not be effective at times. The fact that policies go through faculty for approval shows that we have shared governance. In some campuses, the Faculty Senate might have more of a role in policies. Academic and Administrative councils are subsets of Faculty Senate. Dr. Oldham said, if he were creating the structure from the beginning, he would have had one body instead of the two councils. The Faculty Senate could look at making changes, review it, and propose something to the University.
 - The biggest part of shared governance is having a voice, and the fact that we're having this meeting now proves that point. As a state-funded institution, governance clearly and statutorily resides in Nashville and is delegated from there through the campus structure. The more you talk, the better the communication is and the more likely everyone is satisfied with the outcomes.
 - A lot of campuses would have a unified senate that would handle the faculty part and then have an administrative side to handle those types of things. There is some benefit to that type of set-up, but there's maybe some unnecessary confusion at times. It can get laborious if you have a unified Faculty Senate, and you're moving a policy through. One group might approve it with no changes, and then the next group might not approve it.
 - Dr. Oldham said he values the dialogue with the Faculty Senate. Even if there's a disagreement, everyone can understand the "why" behind it through open communication. There's a lot of value in the Faculty Senate, per Dr. Oldham. Dr. Oldham wouldn't advocate for changing the Faculty Senate just for change's sake.

4. Enrollment:

- What is being done to explore other avenues to attract good students and sustain enrollment growth?

- **President Oldham:** There's an underlying premise that enrollment hasn't changed much in the last 15 years, but Dr. Oldham said it really has. From 2014, we were at a high point for enrollment. We were at 11,339, the year before Tennessee Promise was introduced. We then went through a seven-year decline in enrollment. There was a precipitous drop in international student enrollment. In 2014, we had 1,000 more international students than we do now.
 - In 2022, we had our first Presidential Scholarship recipient. In 2022, we topped 2,000 freshmen for the first time in a decade. Since 2021, we've been growing at a 2.2% rate. The previous seven years, we were declining. We've got a lot of the fundamental issues in recruiting worked out.
 - We have a Cabinet-level enrollment team that meets weekly in Dr. Oldham's office for at least an hour, reviewing recruiting, marketing, scholarships, transfer students, the process of admission, VIP tours, Trailblazers, pretty much everything related to enrollment. We continue to find things to do better.
 - One faculty mentioned the Drive to 55 program and asked if it still existed, and Dr. Oldham said it still existed. The goal was to get 55% of Tennesseans to get post-secondary education or certification. THEC still tracks those numbers and is formulating the next strategic plan for higher education in Tennessee.
 - Another faculty said there had been a lot of growth in computer science and it was achieved partly through hiring more faculty. The growth in the faculty hasn't matched the workload of the faculty.
 - We start out trying to grow revenue by 2-3% annually just to stay where we are because of increased costs. The pressure to control tuition increases is real, and we have put a lot of emphasis over the past few years on salaries.
 - We are continuing plans to increase enrollment, and the enrollment team continuously thinks outside of the box for innovative recruitment strategies. An example, we are one of few peer universities that is majority male. Most institutions are at 60/40, majority female. On the undergraduate side, we are 55% male. We have an unbalance in recruiting women. That's a significant issue that touches on academics, campus life, social environment, etc. We've got a group forming now to look at this issue to develop innovative ideas on changing that dynamic. They are open to ideas on recruitment.

5. Tennessee Tech Ranking:

- What plans does the administration have to increase the university's ranking by *U.S. News and World Report*?
- **President Oldham:** Our *U.S. News* ranking dropped last year, but this year, we've moved up 31 spots. We are ranked 257 now out of about 400 institutions. The biggest weighting factors are around graduation rates, graduation rates for Pell students, and the actual graduate rates as opposed to what *U.S. News* determines should be our graduation rates. Our graduation rates are among the highest of the LGIs. This is partly why we put so much importance on graduation and retention rates.

- Peer perception is also part of the *U.S. News* report. About 20% is peer recognition, with about half being graduation rates. That was part of relocating us athletically to a different athletic Conference. Tennessee Tech is better than our perception, and we need to improve the perception and notoriety for the quality of our university.
- Dr. Oldham disagreed that a lot of students are coming here because of the rankings. Another faculty challenged that. Dr. Oldham has heard that affordability and quality have led students to come to Tennessee Tech. Lee Wray said the metrics for the rankings will be in the magazine. The weighting factors include the following percentages: graduation rate, 16%; 1st-year students, 5%; graduation rate performance, 10%; Pell graduation rates, 5.5%; Pell graduation performance, 5.5%; peer assessment, 20%; financial resources per student, 8%.
- We are the best among LGIs for faculty salaries. We are at the top of LGIs for standardized testing. Bibliographic ranking has some room for improvement. We are around 150 nationally.
- To a large extent, Dr. Oldham believes we are “punching above our weight.” According to *U.S. News*, our graduate earnings relative to local high school graduates puts us at Number 2 in the state among public universities. Our borrower debt of students is the best in the state. Carnegie classifies us as an “opportunity university,” which is a combination of access and earnings for graduates. We are the only institution in TN in that category. By that data, our graduates earn 63% higher than those who graduate from high school and do not pursue higher education.

6. Such Other Matters:

- The Nolan Fowler Constitution Day is tomorrow. A film by Brigham Young University was substituted for the original presentation that was to be held.
- **President Oldham:** There were some discussions about that, and that decision was made to abide by the laws surrounding some of the topics of the original presenter’s area of focus.
- A question was asked about the status of the search for the Provost and the VP for Student Affairs.
- **President Oldham:** There are search committees in progress.
- There were some questions about the ADA rules and some students lacking resources.
- **President Oldham:** He said he wasn’t aware of that but that he would investigate it.

Adjourned: 4:50 p.m.