

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MINUTES

September 13, 2024  
Johnson City, Tennessee

The East Tennessee State University Board of Trustees met on Friday, September 13, 2024, at 1:00 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**

Chair Dr. Linda Latimer called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and began by welcoming and congratulating new Student Trustee Trent White.

Trustee Latimer summarized for the board a number of major accomplishments and successes that occurred over the course of the summer:

- ETSU welcomed one of the largest incoming classes in the university's history and the largest number of students ever to live on campus.
- Over the past three years, ETSU has seen nearly a 30 percent increase in new student enrollment, outpacing almost every other college in Tennessee.
- Updates to Burleson Hall are underway, and the renovation of Brown Hall is set to begin soon.
- ETSU Health recently celebrated the opening of a new infectious disease clinic in Kingsport.
- Our Military and Veterans Services Office will create a new AmeriCorps program to support the veteran population both on campus and in the surrounding seven-county area.
- ETSU was named a top employer in Tennessee and one of the best employers for women in the nation.

President Noland recognized two individuals who represent the concepts of partnership and community, Rab and Grant Summers. Dr. Noland pointed to Summers-Taylor Stadium and the presence of the ETSU Alumni Association and the ETSU Foundation in the Model Mill building as examples of the vision of the Summers family. On the programmatic side, Dr. Noland stated that about a year and a half ago, Rab and Grant Summers introduced their vision to build out and strengthen ETSU's Surveying and Mapping program. Dr. Noland then invited Grant and Rab Summers to describe their vision and their reasons for investment in that vision. Grant Summers spoke of the dire need for surveyors across the country and their hope that ETSU's Surveying and Mapping program can be nationally significant. Rab Summers

explained that every time a piece of property is sold and every time a piece of property is developed, a surveyor is involved. He said surveying and mapping are vital to growth and prosperity, adding that ETSU has a great opportunity to be a center of excellence for the entire country. Dr. Noland and Dr. Latimer came forward to express thanks on behalf of the university and the Board of Trustees for the Summers family's investment in our program and the chair in surveying and mapping that they have endowed, which will allow us to attract world-class talent to the campus and produce a pipeline of graduates. Trustee Ramsey, who is a product of that department, added his personal thanks to Grant and Rab Summers for their generosity.

## **II. Roll Call**

Board Secretary Dr. Adam Green led the roll call.

Trustees physically present were:

Chair Dr. Linda Latimer  
Trustee Charles Allen  
Trustee Janet Ayers  
Trustee Dr. Steph Frye-Clark  
Trustee Dorothy Grisham  
Trustee Ron Ramsey  
Trustee Melissa Steagall-Jones  
Trustee Tony Treadway  
Trustee Trent White

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 May 24, 2024**

The minutes from the May 24, 2024, meeting of the Board of Trustees were approved as submitted, with Trustee Melissa Steagall-Jones 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**

Trustee Janet Ayers reported that the morning's meeting consisted of one action item that was approved by the committee, which was tenure upon appointment for three faculty members and to promote one faculty member along with one correction from the May meeting. Trustee

Ayers stated that Provost McCorkle then presented an update on academic actions for the period of January 1 through July 31, 2024 and an overview of other curriculum actions across the university,

Trustee Ayers stated that the next information item was an update on major initiatives across the Division of Academic Affairs: the implementation of the revision to the academic structure, the launch of the new Compass Core Curriculum, and an update on new curricula recently implemented and planned. Provost McCorkle's report to the committee also included the announcement that a new Dean of Nursing had been hired.

Trustee Ayers then gave a brief summary of Dr. Randy Wykoff's report on research taking place in the College of Public Health as well as the collaborative work in four centers in the college that have greatly contributed to this growth. These centers are all focused on addressing and improving health outcomes in rural areas.

Trustee Ayers concluded her report by summarizing the report made to the committee by Dr. Richard Sander, Director of Athletics.

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

Trustee Ron Ramsey reported that after a very thorough presentation, the committee approved the new campus master plan. He said the presentation covered short-term and long-term initiatives related to capital improvements and implementation for the main campus and the VA campus, covering such categories as housing, parking, and optimizing of academic space.

Trustee Ramsey said the committee heard a financial report for the last quarter of the fiscal year, as an information item and that the committee reviewed all contracts and agreements of \$250,000 or more for the fourth quarter of FY24.

The committee received an update on initiatives underway in the Division of Business and Finance, including details on the Oracle transition.

## **VII. Report from the Audit Committee**

Committee Chair Melissa Steagall-Jones reported that the Audit Committee reviewed and approved two action items: the audit plan for FY25 and employee profiles for the Department of Internal Audit.

Chair Steagall-Jones reported that there were several information items including audits that have been completed, reports on the recommendation log status, and audit functions within the Department of Internal Audit. Ms. Steagall-Jones reported on the very positive results of a survey sent to campus clients regarding the work of the department.

## **VIII. Consent Agenda**

Chair Latimer called the board's attention to the Consent Agenda that included several routine items as well as items acted upon during the morning's committee meetings. Chair Latimer asked if there were any items on the Consent Agenda that need to be pulled for discussion and consideration by the full board. There were none.

Chair Latimer asked for a motion to approve the full Consent Agenda. Trustee Charles Allen moved that the Consent Agenda be approved, and Trustee Janet Ayers seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

## **IX. Go Beyond the Classroom: ETSU's Quality Enhancement Plan Update**

Provost McCorkle reminded the board that the Go Beyond Initiative is the university's Quality Enhancement Plan, or QEP. Such a five-year plan is a requirement of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. ETSU's plan focuses on community-engaged learning. Provost McCorkle said that ETSU officially received approval for our QEP in December of 2023. Year one of the QEP has now been completed. She indicated that our over-arching goal is to be able to say to every ETSU student, "You will have an opportunity to have a curricular experience in the community during your time here as an undergraduate student."

Dr. Susan McCracken, Vice Provost for Community Engagement and Director of the Quality Enhancement Plan provided a report on the first year of the QEP. She told the board that 49 courses have earned the Community-Engaged Learning Course designation, and nearly 1,000 students were enrolled in these courses last year. Dr. McCracken shared several testimonials about the success of the QEP and community engagement thus far.

Dr. McCracken also reported on success in working with ETSU faculty and staff to provide a wide array of professional development opportunities. Some 98 faculty and staff have participated in QEP professional development activities, 49 faculty have earned Community-Engaged Learning designation, and 11 Community-Engaged Learning grants have been funded to date.

In addition, Dr. McCracken stressed the importance of community partners and the ETSU faculty and staff who work with them. She highlighted the ETSU Elevates program as an excellent example of leadership development and community engagement, along with Alternative Spring Break, the Service Plunge, and Service Saturdays.

Dr. McCracken then presented to the board data used to assess the three learning outcomes: connecting, influencing, and contributing. She said the goal for the end of the QEP is that at least 75 percent of students will be at the emerging or proficient levels and that at least 50

percent are at the proficient level after five years. Dr. McCracken pointed out that we have already exceeded those targets this past year.

As for the future, Dr. McCracken stated that we are working on the application for ETSU to be a Community-Engaged Designated University as recognized by the Carnegie Foundation. Work is continuing to establish a campus-wide Community Engagement Committee. Another goal is to increase the number of 1000- and 2000-level courses with a community engagement experience, and plans are to expand faculty and staff professional development to enhance and increase community-engaged research.

## **X. Enrollment Update**

Dr. Joe Sherlin, Vice President for Student Life and Enrollment, reported that from fall 2023 to fall 2024, we are up 120 students on the main campus, which is just under 1 percent. At the graduate level, we experienced a slight drop after record enrollment in fall 2023. Dr. Sherlin said we have been slowly and steadily rebuilding our undergraduate base since the pandemic. Dr. Sherlin indicated that we have seen significant increases in Asian and Latinx student populations. The male-to-female participation gap has remained consistent, paralleling national trends.

Dr. Sherlin pointed out that it has long been our aspiration to achieve a class of 2,100 freshmen, and that aspiration has become reality for the past two years. Since 2020, we have increased the freshman class size by 30 percent, and the academic quality of the class has improved. Our freshman class includes students from over 20 countries. Since 2020, the on-campus residential population has grown by 90 percent.

Speaking about growth in engagement on campus, Dr. Sherlin noted that this fall, we experienced the largest Preview in the history of ETSU, with over 1,900 participants. Record meal plan participation occurred this fall, with a 1,000-meal per day increase. Daily visits to the Center for Physical Activity are up 25 percent, and there has been a 70 percent increase in the number of clubs on campus.

Dr. Sherlin reported that our retention rate has been steadily climbing since the pandemic, and the recent 76 percent is the second highest rate achieved in the past decade. Our six-year graduation rate has increased by 12 percent over the last seven years, which places ETSU in the top quartile of institutions like us across the country. But, Dr. Sherlin said, we have significant ground to cover to achieve goals of 85 percent for freshman retention and 60 percent for graduation.

Dr. Sherlin reviewed major initiatives that will be undertaken this year. They include:

- A one-stop shop for integrated service from Financial Aid, Bursar services, and registration

- An effort to grow enrollment of military-affiliated students
- Creation of a student success center focusing on low-income and first-generation students
- Growth in enrollment from East Tennessee and strategic markets
- Embedding success practices in the first and second year, related to general education redesign and data-informed outreach and support in advising

Dr. Sherlin then highlighted the work of several ETSU people who personified the “Go Beyond” theme during the campus move-in period. Sean Morris, who heads up grounds and landscape, volunteered to lead planning, logistics, and implementation for campus move-in with over 3,000 guests and coordinated over 400 volunteers. Kari Albarado, Director of Campus Recreation, assigned her entire staff team to support move-in and was the official greeter and traffic coordinator at the main campus entrance. And Timothy Lewis, Director of New Student and Family Programs, partnered with Dr. Bonnie Burchett in Housing to grow move-in as a true campus-wide experience. He hosted a Family Welcome event, in addition to identifying students with enrollment challenges and working with First-Year Experience instructors to walk students to offices to get assistance.

## **XI. President’s Report**

President Noland focused his remarks on elements in the strategic plan: access and success, strategic initiatives, the higher education landscape, community stewardship, and campus engagement.

Access and success: Dr. Noland reiterated that we have enrolled the second largest freshman class in the history of the university, in the face of all the federal government’s problems with FAFSA that prevented students from being able to know their financial aid packages until well after the close of their senior year of high school. Dr. Noland noted that enrollment is up across the board, with an increase of 152 students. On the undergraduate level, the top five programs in terms of enrollment are Nursing, Psychology, Computer Science, Management, and Biology. On the graduate level, they are Public Health, Educational Leadership, Nursing, the online Business Administration program, and Social Work. Examining retention, Dr. Noland indicated that we have recovered from the COVID downturn. Incorporating THEC data, our retention rate is at 81 percent. The six-year cohort graduation rate is up year over year (53 percent in 2018 compared to 50 percent in 2017), but there are gaps across demographic groups. Those are being addressed through intervention efforts undertaken by Dr. Sherlin and his staff.

Strategic initiatives: Of the items that the Board of Trustees identified for the university to prioritize in a five-year time period, about half have been accomplished thus far. Those include:

- Enhancing bridge programs for underrepresented students

- Implementing an African American male leadership initiative
- Developing a revised peer group comprised of realistic and aspirational institutions
- Implementing academic department chair training
- Obtaining membership in the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities
- Brown Hall renovation, Phase I
- Academic Building construction
- Lamb Hall renovation
- Completion of the 2024-2034 Facilities Master Plan
- Creation of innovative programs in health sciences, business and technology, and arts and sciences
- Enhancement of Valleybrook to enable innovation in key research and educational areas
- Enhancement of the general education curriculum

Dr. Noland added that a significant number of items that the board asked us to achieve within a five-to-ten-year time period have been accomplished. They are:

- Undertaking a review of campus branding
- Doubling the volume of externally-sponsored research activity
- Becoming recognized as a “Great College to Work For”
- Improving retention rates for minority students, Pell-eligible students, and other groups to 80 percent
- Improving graduation rates for minority students, Pell-eligible students, and others to 60 percent
- Expanding Access ETSU for neuro- and physically-diverse students
- Maintaining and expanding current funding levels from NIH and increasing research expenditures derived from federal agencies other than NIH
- Beginning construction or renovation of a new residence hall
- Enhancing Sherrod Library to become the key academic collaboration space for ETSU

Dr. Noland reviewed the list of ETSU’s prioritized opportunities, including budget model optimization, the Voyager initiative, enhancing classification and compensation, academic portfolio analysis, a strategic enrollment plan, research administration, and housing transformation. He then reviewed a timeline for the realization of these opportunities.

Dr Noland thanked the board for its approval of the Facilities Master Plan, which will now be submitted to the state and then to the State Building Commission.

The higher education landscape: Dr. Noland said that for many higher education institutions across the country, the dominant issues are declining enrollment and how to protect affordability and value. He shared national statistics on college aspirations for students, who report that they choose to attend college to be able to make more money, to be able to get a better job and/or a promotion, to have more job security, and to get training for a specific

career. Students wish to find degrees and majors that put them in a position to realize a return on investment. He noted that non-traditional students are focused on on-the-job training.

Dr. Noland shared the results of a 2024 EAB national survey of thousands of college students. The top criteria that the freshman class of 2024 considered when making college decisions were location, financial aid offered, affordable tuition, and campus beauty. These elements, Dr. Noland noted, are elements that the ETSU Board of Trustees included in our strategic plan. Shifting student expectations post-COVID include easy access to online study material, flexible schedules to work part-time, and the ability to view recorded classes later. As far as college preparedness is concerned, first-generation students and underrepresented students do not feel well prepared for college, meaning that they want enhanced advising, enhanced tutoring, and enhanced academic support. They also want a sense of safety, a sense of belonging, and a sense of place. Dr. Noland said these are some of the reasons that mental health is included in our strategic plan. The survey showed, further, that about one-third of students do not feel that college is worth the cost. However, Dr. Noland shared statistics indicating that, post-pandemic, tuition and fees are actually less than the pre-pandemic period when adjusted for inflation.

Community stewardship: In describing ETSU's sound financial condition compared to many other institutions nationwide, Dr. Noland stressed the importance of realizing that behind those numbers are people. In particular, he praised the work of Dr. Heather Levesque in Admissions and Ms. Jess Vodden in Marketing and Communications and reiterated the commendation expressed earlier for Sean Morris and his staff for their work on our grounds and their help on move-in day.

Emphasizing the importance of our role in raising levels of educational attainment, Dr. Noland then shared national statistics from the Federal Reserve. A survey of over 16,600 respondents indicates that most people feel they are not doing as well as they were a few years ago. But those who feel the most sound in their finances are those with college degrees. Those who feel the least stable in their finances are those with less than a high school diploma. The survey showed that Americans right now are struggling with basic living expenses, and in our region, housing. Dr. Noland noted that in 2021, the average price of a home in Johnson City was \$299,000. Now that same home is \$379,000—a trend that affects our students and our faculty and staff.

Campus engagement: Dr. Noland expressed hope that everyone on the board would be in attendance for the next day's football game versus North Dakota State, the number-two team in the country. Dr. Noland also invited the board to take part in Founders Week. Among the week's activities are BUCS Stuff the Bus to provide school supplies for at-risk schools; the ETSU Elevates competition; ETSU Remembers; a Presidential Lecture on the life of President Burgin E. Dossett; the State of the University Address; and the football game with Samford.



**XII. Other Business**

There was no other business to come before the board.

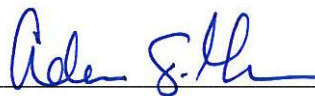
**XIII. Executive Session**

There was no need to convene in executive session.

**XIV. Adjournment**

Trustee Ramsey moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Adam Green", is written over a horizontal line.

Adam Green  
Secretary of the Board of Trustees

Approved by the Board of Trustees at its November 15, 2024 meeting.