

Tennessee University Faculty Senates Position Paper on the Reorganization of Higher Education in Tennessee

I. Background

Tennessee University Faculty Senates (TUFS), an association of the four-year state university Senates founded in April 2008, represents nearly 10,000 higher education faculty in Tennessee. It is an historic collaboration, involving faculty from the four campuses of the University of Tennessee system and the six universities of the Board of Regents system.

As the statewide reorganization of higher education became a topic of conversation in Nashville in 2009, TUFS sought to make a contribution. This potential reorganization was the central theme of TUFS' April 2009 retreat at Fall Creek Falls State Park. Two TUFS representatives, Ed Stevens (University of Memphis) and John Nolt (UTK) were appointed to the joint UT/TBR Task Force on Higher Education in the spring of 2009.

The purpose of this position paper is to lay out TUFS' recommendations for reorganization.

II. General Principles Endorsed by TUFS

As representatives of the faculty of Tennessee's public four-year institutions, TUFS' central purpose is to promote the richest and best possible education for Tennessee students and to provide for Tennessee's faculty the means to deliver that education effectively. Much can be accomplished toward these goals by the reorganization of the state's higher education administration, but only if all of us put aside, to the extent possible, traditional arrangements, political considerations, wrangling over resources, and regional or institutional loyalties.

TUFS also holds that higher education should be frugal with Tennessee's scarce fiscal resources. We seek to avoid waste and unnecessary expense in our teaching, scholarship, creative activity, research and service, and expect a Tennessee higher education administration that is responsive, rational, lean and efficient.

III. Objectives Endorsed by TUFS

TUFS holds that reorganization of higher education should achieve the following objectives:

1. **More rational and efficient organization.** The TBR system, for example, includes two-year community and technical colleges, a foreign language institute and six universities, five of which have doctoral programs. Those on the ground in the TBR system are frequently frustrated by "one-size-fits-all" directives from the TBR administration. A more rational organization might help avoid this.
2. **Faculty and student collaboration and exchange.** The breadth and depth of talent and expertise available in the TBR and UT systems is enormous, but institutional barriers prevent beneficial collaboration and exchange. Graduate students and faculty from each institution would benefit greatly from the ability to move between one campus and the other, but this would be extraordinarily difficult under current arrangements. Much more along these lines could be accomplished to the benefit of faculty and students if it were facilitated by a common administration.
3. **Research informs the education process.** Beginning in the undergraduate years, research informs the teaching and learning process. At both the undergraduate and graduate levels, education and research activities of each university should fulfill its mission statement and facilitate accreditations. Regional access to graduate programs is imperative for an educated citizenry and workforce, and should be maintained.
4. **Seamless system-wide access to library resources for students and faculty.** At present, each university negotiates separate licensing agreements and contracts for library databases and other resources for their library users. This process duplicates efforts across institutions, involving libraries, legal affairs, and purchasing departments on our campuses. Most importantly, it overlooks consortial buying power, which allows greater access to library resources.
5. **Better geographical distribution of programs.** Academic programs have grown up around the state for reasons that are often historical or political. The students of Tennessee will be best served by a distribution designed to deliver a rich array of educational services where they are needed. TUFS supports the reinforcement of programs that deliver valuable services well but are not now adequately

supported and the elimination of unnecessary duplication within service areas but also the development of new programs where needed. These things require effective statewide administration.

6. **Flattening administration.** Higher education in Tennessee is administered at too many distinct levels, which are often too far removed from the classroom to appreciate the effects of their decisions on campus administrators, faculty and students. In addition to campus administrations, which themselves can be extremely complex, there are the two systems and their boards of Trustees, and THEC.

IV. Recommendations

In order to flatten administrative systems, better serve students, reduce costs and advance the other objectives of reorganizing higher education in Tennessee, TUFS recommends that:

1. Whatever administrative structure emerges from the reorganization ensures the ability of faculty and students (both graduate and undergraduate) to move easily without institutional barriers among the various campuses. It should be easy for students to take classes at more than one campus while respecting prerequisites. There should also be a visiting faculty consortium that allows faculty to work at other state campuses. Achieving these goals will require coordination of academic calendars.
2. With respect to libraries, there should be a statewide catalog, centralized vendor contract negotiation, and centralized purchase of library resources, which facilitate broad access.
3. There should be a statewide common general education core curriculum.
4. Institutions should have interconnected IT systems.
5. It should be easy to develop joint academic programs that use resources from multiple state institutions.
6. Application for undergraduate admission to all state institutions should be centralized, leaving recruitment and acceptance to individual campuses.
7. Centralization of the following functions should also be considered:
 - Benefits - insurance, medical, retirement, etc.
 - Human resources policies and procedures
 - Purchasing
 - Research administration.
8. As a further cost-saving measure, the proportion of campus budgets used for administration should be regularly examined.
9. There are several good ways to organize the governance of higher education in Tennessee. However, we suggest establishing a separate system for the community colleges and technical schools, and merging the Tennessee Board of Regents universities with The University of Tennessee system. The administration of the resulting university system should be located in Nashville. We recommend that each campus in the new system have a local advisory board that is unpaid, self-perpetuating, and dedicated to the interests of its local university. University faculty senates should be involved in all stages of the development of this new system.