

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MINUTES

February 21, 2025  
Johnson City, Tennessee

The East Tennessee State University Board of Trustees met on Friday, February 21, 2025, at 1:30 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 1:30 p.m. She reported on several milestones and accomplishments that highlight the dedication and talent within the university community. Among the highlights:

- At the recent Tennessee Intercollegiate State Legislature, ETSU students received multiple recognitions including the prestigious Carlisle Awards and Outstanding Representative honors. ETSU student Kyah Powers was elected as Governor for the upcoming session.
- Trey Hensley, an adjunct faculty member in the Bluegrass, Old-Time, and Roots Music Studies program, won the Grammy for Best Traditional Blues Album.
- The ETSU Center for Appalachian Studies and Services is celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and it has been instrumental in research, cultural preservation, and community engagement throughout the region.
- The ETSU Research Corporation, in partnership with the state of Tennessee, recently released the results of the Northeast Tennessee Music Census, which showed that the music industry contributes \$75.9 million annually to the region's economy. The Research Corporation also cohosted a community summit to discuss the findings and to explore additional ways to support and develop the regional music industry and ecosystem.

Chair Latimer expressed her thanks to Tennessee Governor Bill Lee for including funding for Phase 2 of the renovation of Brown Hall and funds to update ETSU's facilities at Valleybrook in his proposed budget. She said Governor Lee and members of the Tennessee General Assembly continue to be important supporters of higher education, positioning Tennessee as a leader for both innovation and workforce development. As the hub for many of ETSU's science classrooms and research laboratories, she said, Brown Hall is a critical facility on the campus. She added that

Valleybrook will serve as an important incubator space for businesses in pioneering fields, helping to strengthen and expand our biomanufacturing industry in the region.

## **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 Steve DeCarlo  
Trustee Dr. Steph Frye-Clark  
Trustee Dorothy Grisham  
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 November 15, 2024**

The minutes from the November 15, 2024, meeting of the Board of Trustees were approved as submitted, with Trustee Melissa Steagall-Jones making the motion to approve and Trustee Tony Treadway 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 two action items and four information items. For the first action item, Provost Dr. Kimberly McCorkle presented the Policy on the Use of Artificial Intelligence Technologies for Instructional and Assignment Purposes, which the committee approved. For the second action item, Provost McCorkle presented a request to provide notification of the adoption of the Institutional Research Security Policy, which the Board of Trustees passed in December 2024. The committee voted to authorize the President to notify the chairs of the Education Committees of the Tennessee Senate and House of Representatives of the adoption of the new policy.

Among the four information items, Provost McCorkle gave a report on academic notification actions that took place from August 1, 2024, through December 31, 2024. There were seven curriculum actions that required notification to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and thirteen curriculum actions that did not require THEC notification, including the establishment of a new Center for Rural Education.

Chair Ayers reported that Dr. David Linville, Associate Vice President for Clinical Affairs, presented to the committee an executive summary of the annual Institutional Review of Graduate Medical Education. The review demonstrates that the program continues to meet all accreditation standards.

Chair Ayers summarized the presentation made to the committee by Dr. Jeffrey Snodgrass, Dean of the College of Health Sciences, which consisted of an overview of the academic, research, and clinical contributions of the college.

Chair Ayers concluded her report by providing a brief review of the report given to the committee by Dr. Joe Sherlin, Vice President for Student Life and Enrollment. He shared information with the committee on historic enrollment growth for the last three entering classes and the largest on-campus residential population in the history of ETSU. New initiatives in the works for the Division of Student Life and Enrollment include a Student Success Center, a One-Stop Shop, and a Student Life Village.

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

Trustee Steve DeCarlo reported that his committee reviewed several agenda items focused on the financial health of ETSU. The committee approved the proposal to keep College of Medicine tuition constant for academic year 2025-26. The committee also approved the proposed student housing and meal plan rates for fall 2025. Both these items are included in the Board's Consent Agenda.

Chair DeCarlo reported that the committee heard an update on the university's financial condition for the last quarter. Revenues and expenditures have seen positive growth, with tuition, state appropriations, and auxiliary revenues all showing increases.

As part of an information item, the committee reviewed criteria for consideration of an increase in tuition and mandatory fees and was given information on comparative rates for all public universities in Tennessee. Those figures demonstrate that ETSU continues to be an affordable option among public institutions in Tennessee. In accordance with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission's limits on tuition and mandatory fee increases of 0 percent to 4 percent, for budget development purposes, ETSU is considering no less than a 4 percent increase for the 2025-26 academic year.

As another information item, the committee was given figures on salary pools that are in Governor Bill Lee's proposed budget and the amount of money ETSU would need to identify internally to fund faculty and staff raises, ranging from 2 percent to 3 percent.

Finally, the committee heard a discussion about updates and improvements to the university's ProCard program.

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

Committee Chair Melissa Steagall-Jones reported that the Audit Committee heard a report from Ms. Becky Lewis, Director of Internal Audit, on audits performed since the November Board of Trustees meeting. There were two, the Auxiliary Enterprises audit and the WETS-FM financial statement audit. There were no significant issues or findings in either audit.

The committee heard a report by Ms. Christy Graham, Chief Financial Officer, on ETSU's audited financial statements from the Comptroller of the Treasury. The audit received an unmodified opinion, with no findings. This is the first time since 2019 that the ETSU audit has included no findings.

Ms. Steagall-Jones then told the board that the Audit Committee heard an update from ETSU Public Safety on the annual Clery Report, which shows a decrease in campus crime. The committee meeting concluded with the news that the ETSU Department of Public Safety has earned accreditation by the Tennessee Law Enforcement Accreditation Program.

## **VIII. Consent Agenda**

Chair Latimer then 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 needed to be pulled for discussion and consideration by the full board. There were none.

Chair Latimer then asked for a motion to approve the full Consent Agenda. Trustee Melissa Steagall-Jones moved that the Consent Agenda be approved, and Trustee Janet Ayers seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

## **IX. Overview of Athletic Department's Strategic Plan**

Dr. Richard Sander, Director of Intercollegiate Athletics, outlined the department's plan to navigate the future, beginning with the impacts of NIL, inflation, changes in conference affiliation, and the settlement of the House vs. NCAA lawsuit. He explained that the nearly \$2.8 billion settlement will result in ETSU contributing \$288,000 a year to the NCAA for the next 10 years, beginning this June in accordance with the terms of the settlement agreement. Institutions were directed by the NCAA to opt in or out of the new model by March 1, 2025. Dr. Sander explained that opting in means that an institution can compensate student-athletes directly for their NIL rights/revenue share and that there will be roster limits for teams instead of scholarship limits.

Against this backdrop, Dr. Sander said the ETSU Department of Intercollegiate Athletics has developed a new strategic plan, consisting of six elements: student-athlete experience, fiscal management, facilities, organization, revenue generation, and strategic engagement. Within the student-athlete experience component, ETSU will focus on 10 areas: academic performance, athletic performance, mental health, nutrition, career development, sports psychology, networking, mentoring and peer counseling, student/staff engagement, and a leadership academy.

Dr. Sander shared some factors involved in fiscal management as part of the new environment for college athletics, including the House settlement, NIL, revenue sharing, inflation, and travel and scheduling. He supplied travel figures for ETSU football trips to Mercer University in 2023 and 2025. These figures show a 24 percent increase in travel costs, from \$44,611 to \$55,213. This is just one example of why new revenue must be generated and the department must become more entrepreneurial.

Dr. Sander then discussed facilities, indicating that a consultant has been retained to look at needs and opportunities in all facilities used by the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics.

#### **X. ETSU Research Update: Using Biomimetic Robotics to Better Understand Pollinator Behavior**

Provost Dr. Kimberly McCorkle introduced Dr. Melissa Whitaker, Assistant Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences, who gave a presentation on her work with pollinators. She told the board that her lab is especially interested in the functions and consequences of non-nutritional elements that are in flower nectar and how they affect pollinator behaviors, specifically related to decisions. She pointed out that studying pollinator decision making is tedious and laborious if it is done in the field. Therefore, she and her colleagues have developed a new method of reporting bee visitation and understanding their preferences. Dr. Whitaker recognized two of her master's degree students, Skylar Mathieson and Josh Foley, and Professor David Zollinger from the Department of Engineering Technology. Together, they have designed a robotic flower that includes a very small camera that is motion-triggered. She noted that if a bee is tagged, researchers can connect to its individual identity. Underneath the "flower," bees can access a nectar reservoir filled with artificial nectar. The camera records the time of the bees' visitations and the duration, and the information is saved on tiny computers.

Dr. Whitaker said that her graduate students are using the "flowers" in their research investigating the effects of psychoactive floral compounds on pollinator behavior. Two of those compounds are caffeine and nicotine, both of which enhance pollinator learning.

Dr. Whitaker pointed out that much has been learned about how bees behave outside the nest, and she indicated that she and her colleagues are now interested in how these compounds, one of which is morphine, affect them in the nest. In the future, she said, the

hope is to use machine vision to track and observe bee behavior within the nest, using an artificial nest box. Each bee would be given an individual QR tag so that locations can be tracked and recorded. The goal is to learn more about such subjects as queen care, grooming, and food sharing, as well as how chemicals affect bee behavior at the colony level.

Dr. Whitaker concluded her presentation by thanking her graduate and undergraduate students and Professor Zollinger for their collaboration, as well as the College of Arts and Sciences, which has funded her research.

## **XI. Voyager Update**

Dr. Karen King, Chief Information Officer, presented a status report on the upcoming implementation of the Voyager/Oracle system. She began by reviewing the project timeline, starting with last July's relaunch. Since then, she said, work has continued on planning and design. During the next few months, various testing sessions will occur, along with cut-over practice. Examples of systems integration testing, which is now underway, include parking deductions, integrations with the bank, and integrations with state agencies.

Dr. King pointed out that a number of business impacts have been realized with a high level of confidence, including a streamlined application process for employees. She noted that with the new system, an employee can apply for a job in approximately five minutes. She showed examples of the system's web clock and leave request sheets as they would look on mobile devices.

Dr. King said the chart of accounts has undergone a complete redesign, resulting in what will be an efficient framework for financial management. Other features include improved supplier registration and the ability to assign security in the system based on a person's role.

Dr. King told the Board that she expects all training materials to be completed in April. Training will take place throughout the spring, summer, and fall. Multiple training modalities will be used, such as quick-reference guides, videos, instructor-led training, and Oracle Guided Learning.

Dr. King indicated that she sees no "red flags" at this point, and the plan is to go live with the system in July.

## **XII. President's Report**

Dr. Noland began his presentation by reaffirming the mission of ETSU: to improve the quality of life for the people of the region and beyond. He then turned to the work of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, which is now creating a strategic master plan for the state's universities, community colleges, and colleges of applied technology.

Through a statewide survey of policy leaders and opinion makers, the commission has identified a list of issues critical to higher education. Among them are student success, mental health, campus safety, return on investment, maintenance and development of facilities, and the quality of teaching and learning. Dr. Noland commented that this list reaffirms the commonality between ETSU's strategic plan and the one that is emerging from THEC.

Dr. Noland noted that the first element in the THEC survey is student success and that the first pillar in ETSU's strategic plan is access and success. He reported that this spring, ETSU undergraduate enrollment is up by 343 students compared to the same time last year, while overall enrollment is up by 279. Enrollment figures indicate that ETSU has fully rebounded from the downturn that occurred during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Further, fall to spring retention for freshmen now stands at 90.4 percent. Applications are up by 800 over this time last year.

Continuing to focus on the student success aspect of our strategic plan, Dr. Noland discussed ETSU's work in building a regional P20 network, consistent with the ETSU 125, Chapter 2 study. He said that ETSU staff are engaged in improving the college-going rate in the region, building dual enrollment opportunities, ensuring that students are prepared in high school for careers and transition to college, improving retention and persistence to graduation, exploring ways to better serve adult populations, and helping to find meaningful employment for our graduates inside and outside the region.

Dr. Noland stressed that the P20 initiative not only involves a partnership with other educators, it relies on business and industry partnerships. As an example, he highlighted the \$15 million Bloomberg grant. ETSU is a principal partner with Ballad Health in educating students to become LPNs while they are still in high school and then for that degree to articulate and transfer seamlessly to a community college or ETSU. He said that rather than Ballad replicating staff, it took the leadership team already in place for P20, and they are leading the Bloomberg effort. Using that same basic structure, Dr. Noland said, we have applied for a \$2 million Rural Health Care Pathway Grant from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission to expand pre-practical nursing programs to other counties in the region, in partnership with the Tennessee College of Applied Technology in Morristown. Dr. Noland told the Board that this is another example of how the ETSU master plan is being put into action.

Turning to operations, President Noland reviewed operating budget figures for 2024-25 which show that the university's budget exceeds \$400 million. Outlining what the university is doing for the next fiscal year, Dr. Noland said a budget call to the campus has gone out and that the new budget will be built with the assumption of a constant enrollment level. The new budget model, nearly complete, will be used for the 2025-26 budget. Dr. Noland pointed out that under the new model, job vacancy management will be done at the divisional level, with each vice president managing those vacancies. He said that the university is in a solid position as it relates to the primary components of the budget, with the bulk of revenue that supports the institution coming from tuition and

fees and a significant percentage coming from the state. He indicated that this year, Governor Bill Lee's budget not only is balanced but it is making solid investments in operating, capital, and salaries. He said the funding for Phase 2 of Brown Hall renovation will change the face of science education on campus and that he and the staff are working to ensure that the funding for the project and the funding for Valleybrook remain in the budget as it moves through the legislative process. Dr. Noland emphasized the fortunate position ETSU is in with regard to state support

The state's investments in higher education, Dr. Noland said, are one reason why we are able to hold down tuition and fees, and those investments benefit our employees. He noted that at its November 2024 meeting, the board authorized across-the-board salary enhancements for faculty and staff and also created a supplemental pool of \$3 million that will allow for market adjustments. Dr. Noland reported that by the end of March, \$1.6 million in market salary enhancements will be distributed to faculty. Then, as the new classification and compensation system is put in place through Voyager, that structure will be used to make staff market adjustments later in the spring. All market adjustments, he said, will be retroactive to November.

Dr. Noland summarized the work being done to enhance facilities across campus. Phase 1 of Brown Hall renovation is underway, with displaced faculty and staff temporarily occupying the former Northeast State space downtown. Burleson Hall renovation is complete and faculty and staff will move back into that building soon. We are continuing to build out the Commons, and construction of the new Academic Building is progressing. Projects to come include Brown Hall Phase 2 and the Integrated Health Sciences building, with a groundbreaking planned for this year. Dr. Noland thanked ETSU's capital staff for their diligence in managing so many important projects.

Dr. Noland then briefly reviewed strategic initiatives related to our strategic goal of community stewardship. Those included the work of the Strategic Enrollment Management Task Force, financial aid optimization, the Strategic Resource Alignment Advisory Committee, plans for the comprehensive Student Success Center, research enhancement and diversification, and school implementation as part of the recent academic restructuring on campus.

Dr. Noland told the Board that the university remains committed to assisting students, faculty, and staff who were affected by Hurricane Helene, as well as those who are undergoing hardships because of the recent flooding in the region. He reiterated that Alternative Spring Break 2025 will focus on rebuilding in our region.

Dr. Noland then outlined the university's current legislative agenda:

- Ensure that the Tennessee Higher Education Commission recommendation on state appropriations moves through the state budget process
- Support the THEC recommendation regarding the Gatton College of Pharmacy and the Quillen College of Medicine



- Continue to ensure that we secure resources in Governor Lee's budget for Phase 2 of Brown Hall renovation and for Valleybrook
- Support THEC's efforts to deepen financial aid opportunities for students. Dr. Noland noted that these efforts will primarily assist students at Tennessee's colleges of applied technology but that those opportunities will affect ETSU positively in the long run.

Dr. Noland reported to the Board that the university is paying very close attention to recent developments at the federal level and how they might affect us. The Chair also directed staff to review any language in university policy and operations to ensure compliance and appropriate alignment with state and federal law.

Looking to the months ahead, Dr. Noland highlighted the appearance of author Anthony Doerr and actor LeVar Burton for the ETSU Festival of Ideas 2025, pointing out that Doerr's book *All the Light You Cannot See* was chosen as ETSU's Campus Read. He added that there are three remaining Broadway performances at the Martin Center this season.

Dr. Noland closed his presentation by describing recent celebrations. Building on the day's earlier announcement that ETSU Public Safety has earned accreditation from the Tennessee Association of Chiefs of Police, he announced that Interim Chief Mark Tipton is no longer interim and is now the new Chief of Police at ETSU on a permanent basis.

### **XIII. Other Business**

There was no other business to come before the board.

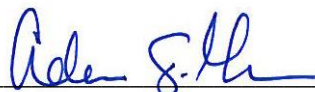
### **XIV. Executive Session**

There was no need to convene in executive session.

### **XV. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Adam Green  
Secretary of the Board of Trustees

Approved by the Board of Trustees at its May 23, 2025 meeting.