

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MINUTES

November 14, 2025
Johnson City, Tennessee

The East Tennessee State University Board of Trustees met on Friday, November 14, 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 Melissa Steagall-Jones called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. She began by highlighting some of the university's recent successes and achievements. Among them:

- ETSU student Kyah Powers is in the running for a Rhodes Scholarship and is our third finalist in as many years.
- The ETSU iGEM team recently traveled to Paris to present research on "hidden hunger," building on the work of Dr. Tianhu Sun, who received the New Innovator Award from the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research.
- President Noland was inducted into the Tri-Cities Business Hall of Fame.

Chair Steagall-Jones encouraged the board's participation in upcoming events, including the Holiday Lights Celebration on November 17 and Military Appreciation Day during the November 22 home football game.

II. Roll Call

Board Secretary Dr. Adam Green led the roll call.

Trustees physically present were:

Chair Melissa Steagall-Jones
Trustee Charles Allen
Trustee Janet Ayers
Trustee Steve DeCarlo
Trustee Wade Farmer
Trustee Dorothy Grisham
Trustee Jon Lundberg

Trustee Ron Ramsey
Trustee Grant Summers
Trustee Tony Treadway
Trustee Aashi Vora

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 September 12, 2025

The minutes from the September 12, 2025, meeting of the Board of Trustees were approved as submitted, with Trustee Dorothy Grisham making the motion to approve and Trustee Janet Ayers seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

V. Report from the Academic, Research, and Student Success Committee

Trustee Janet Ayers reported that her committee's morning agenda included one action item and four information items. The committee voted to approve the submission of a Letter of Notification to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission to establish a new Master of Science in Environment, Health, and Disaster Studies. Provost Kimberly McCorkle told the committee that the program will draw on the strengths of several ETSU departments and will rely on partnerships with a number of state agencies.

Trustee Ayers summarized a presentation by Dr. Michael Hoff on the 2024-25 Quality Assurance Funding process. For 2024-25, ETSU achieved perfect scores on all but two of the six standards, earning an overall score of 87 out of 100. For the current five-year cycle, the university achieved an average of 91.8 points. This is the last year of the five-year cycle, meaning that a new set of standards is forthcoming.

Trustee Ayers reported on an information item presented by Provost McCorkle and Dr. Susan McCracken on Community-Engaged Learning, which is the university's student success initiative as part of the SACSCOC reaffirmation of accreditation. In the first two years of the initiative, over 80 CEL courses have been developed, with more than 1,000 students participating.

Trustee Ayers summarized for the board a presentation given by Dr. Kyle Leister, Assistant Professor and Program Director for the Orthotics and Prosthetics program. Dr. Leister's research focuses on wearable technologies and machine learning to improve patient mobility.

Trustee Ayers said the final information item, presented by Dr. Michelle Byrd and Dr. Leah Adinolfi, dealt with ongoing and new methods of student engagement to support overall student wellness. They provided data on student case management, student emergency funding, and the provision of basic needs. Dr. Adinolfi described resources available through the Robertson Center, and Dr. Byrd provided an update on several mental health initiatives. Dr. Byrd also announced that the Counseling Center is pursuing accreditation.

VI. Report from the Finance and Administration Committee

Trustee Steve DeCarlo told the board that his committee approved the October 2025 budget revisions for the main campus, the College of Medicine, Family Medicine, and the College of Pharmacy. The committee heard a quarterly report of revenues and expenditures, compared with the same period during the previous year. The next information item was a presentation on the annual Tuition Transparency Report that outlines how money from tuition and mandatory fees has been spent. Finally, the committee heard a report on agreements of \$250,000 or greater for the period of July through September of 2025. There were three contracts, one RFQ, and one RFP.

VII. Report from the Audit Committee

Committee Chair Ron Ramsey reported that the committee approved revisions to the FY26 Audit Plan, which included adding three fraud, waste, and abuse concerns and removing two engagements. Chair Ramsey said his committee heard reports on the completion of one audit and two advisory engagements. Follow-up reviews on three previous audits are progressing in a reasonable fashion. After a review of Audit Committee responsibilities, the committee had no changes to those responsibilities. The committee then went into executive session.

VIII. Consent Agenda

Chair Steagall-Jones asked if there were any items on the Consent Agenda that needed to be pulled for discussion and consideration. There were none. Chair Steagall-Jones then moved to amend the Consent Agenda by replacing the previous version of the October revised budget with the version that the Finance and Administration Committee had approved earlier that morning. Trustee Ramsey seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously. Chair Steagall-Jones then asked for a motion to approve the full Consent Agenda, as amended. Trustee Tony Treadway moved that the amended Consent Agenda be approved, and Trustee Janet Ayers seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

IX. Update on ETSU Strategic Agenda

Dr. Michael Hoff, Vice Provost for Decision Support and University Chief Planning Officer provided an overview of ETSU's planning timeline, noting that the state of

Tennessee's Drive to 55 program is now expiring and a new "north star" will be created by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC).

Dr. Hoff discussed the development of a new master plan by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, which is now in process. He said the cornerstones of that proposed plan are: aligned, achievable, and agile.

Revisiting the ETSU strategic agenda's pillars, Dr. Hoff outlined major areas of focus within each.

Access and Success: Brand development, strategic enrollment planning, wraparound advising, updating the academic portfolio, and housing transformation

Teaching Excellence: The QEP and Community-Engaged Learning, SACSCOC and discipline-specific accreditation, updating the academic portfolio, and the facilities master plan

Empowered Employees: Salary enhancements, training and professional development, and Voyager

Research and Innovation: The research strategic plan, enhanced research administration, updating the academic portfolio, and the ETSU Research Corporation

Community Stewardship: The QEP and Community-Engaged Learning, an Integrated Academic Health Science Center, the ETSU Research Corporation, brand development, and GEAR UP

Fiscal Sustainability and Operational Excellence: The budget model update, salary enhancements, the facilities master plan, the strategic enrollment plan, and Voyager

Dr. Hoff emphasized that the changes we have made because of strategic planning have positioned us well, noting the increases in first-time freshman enrollment, the retention rate, the graduation rate, the number of campus residents, and our success in sponsored awards. Dr. Hoff briefly summarized ETSU's progress toward strategic initiatives in terms of both 1-5-year goals and 5-10-year goals. He then reviewed the ETSU Board of Trustees' areas of focus: diversify the academic portfolio, enhance salaries, enhance student success, enhance access/pre-college programs, enhance research/economic development, an Integrated Health Science Center, enhance housing options, and fiscal sustainability. He added that the list aligns well with what THEC is expecting for institutions across the state.

Next steps, Dr. Hoff said, include continuing to implement the university's strategic agenda and provide regular updates to the board; accelerate investments in the student enrollment management plan initiatives; monitor the THEC master plan process and update the board as progress occurs, ensuring that our plan aligns; and engage the board in a series of discussions about enrollment, research, the academic portfolio, and facilities.

President Noland added that in 2026, once THEC’s “north star” goal is finalized, ETSU staff will bring back recommendations to the board for consideration, including perhaps an opportunity to explore different kinds of credentials that we might offer. President Noland expressed confidence in the strategic plan ETSU now has, but he indicated that if the state pivots, we want the latitude to pivot as well.

X. Housing and Residence Life Master Plan Update

Mr. Jeremy Ross, Chief Operating Officer, introduced Mr. Richard Swearingen, Executive Director of Housing and Residence Life, who reviewed occupancy trends in campus residence halls. He noted changes in on-campus occupancy levels. In fall of 2016, there were 3,021 beds on campus, and now there are 3,363. He said the university has added around 500 beds since 2019-20, but we are at full capacity, with 115 students beginning the fall 2025 semester in local hotels. Mr. Swearingen told the board that within 30 days of the beginning of classes, those students were accommodated on campus. The fall 2023 Wachalski Advisors analysis estimated the need for an additional 275 to 300 beds. Mr. Swearingen said we met that demand in the fall of 2024, not by building new space but by expanding capacity in existing space. As the number of freshmen at ETSU continues to grow, the institution will need to explore the creation of additional housing capacity.

Mr. Swearingen then reviewed recent renovations that have been completed in campus residence halls, as well as those that are underway. Mr. Swearingen provided an analysis of the off-campus housing market, within a five-mile radius of the campus, and compared those rates with the university's on-campus housing. The on-campus rates were significantly lower. Dr. Swearingen pointed out that ETSU did not raise housing rates during the COVID-19 Pandemic and several years thereafter, whereas off-campus entities did. This resulted in ETSU housing becoming the lowest price option, which has helped create heavier demand on campus.

Mr. Ross reviewed progress since the creation of the campus master plan and pointed out options for new housing within that plan. He said ETSU is exploring options based on existing bonding, debt, and revenue and that more information will be provided to the board in the near future. President Noland added that we are seeing sustained demand for more on-campus housing. He told the board that the university will soon be bringing to the board a request to build a new residence hall.

XI. BucHouse Student Agency Overview

Dr. Tony Pittarese, Dean of the College of Business and Technology, introduced Dr. Melanie Richards, Director of the School of Marketing and Media, who described the work of BucHouse, an on-campus, full-service marketing and media agency run by students who are guided by faculty mentors. Dr. Richards pointed out that students are paid for their work and that demand for their services has been high. As examples, she

presented a brief view of a recruitment video created for ETSU ROTC and part of a presentation done for the 25th anniversary of the Roan Scholars Leadership Program. Other clients include the ETSU Strong Brain Institute/Healthy Workplaces; ETSU University Marketing and Communication, which is working to raise the university's profile on Niche; and Johnny Brusco's. Dr. Richards outlined the process of how projects are managed, and she listed several new clients, including the Gatton College of Pharmacy, the Strong ACC Achievable Futures Workforce Pathways Project, the Strong ACC Family Education and Support Workgroup, and the League of Women Voters of East Tennessee. Next steps for BucHouse, she said, will be work in event marketing and management, increased community partnerships, Community-Engaged Learning certification, and establishing a physical presence for the agency at the Ashe Street Courthouse.

Students Emma Ayala, a sophomore majoring in marketing, and Carter Newton, a junior majoring in media and communication, shared their BucHouse experiences and praised the agency's role in their career preparation.

XII. President's Report

In his update to the Board of Trustees, President Noland emphasized ETSU's continued focus on mission, strategic planning, and execution of those plans. He reported on enrollment for Fall 2025 with 14,388 students, including 2,284 first-time freshmen, which is an all-time high for the institution. He noted that the Quillen College of Medicine's first-year enrollment will grow to 100 students in 2026, and pharmacy enrollment continues to increase due to tuition reductions made possible by the Tennessee General Assembly's financial support.

President Noland noted that undergraduate recruitment for Fall 2026 is strong, with applications, acceptances, and transfers trending upward. Furthermore, retention stands at 76 percent (goal: 85 percent), and graduation at 55 percent (goal: 60 percent), the highest in ETSU history.

The President shared with the Trustees that ETSU's operating budget exceeds \$400M and that reserves have surpassed \$30M. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission's (THEC) 2026–27 budget recommendation for ETSU is \$106M, adding \$1.3M in new resources primarily for salaries. Two capital projects—an engineering sciences building and campus utility upgrades—have been submitted to THEC and are under consideration.

President Noland thanked Trustees for approving faculty and staff salary enhancements of 2.3 percent as well as a \$1.5M spring 2026 market pool. He noted that ETSU has invested in more than \$25M in salary enhancements since 2022.

President Noland highlighted completed strategic initiatives for 2024–25 including strategic enrollment planning, academic restructuring, financial aid optimization, and

compensation redesign. Strategic priorities for 2025–26 focus on adult degree completion, student success, academic expansion, rural education, and outdoor programs.

The President announced that ETSU has earned “Great College to Work For” Honor Roll status and secured a seven-year, \$28.7 annual Federal Gaining Early Awareness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant to promote college access and success in the region.

President Noland closed his presentation noting 2026 legislative priorities including:

- Support full funding of the THEC appropriations recommendation for the outcomes formula, salary enhancements, and deferred maintenance.
- Support THEC recommendation for TSAA funding and other state supported financial aid programs.
- Support THEC recommendation for the Gatton College of Pharmacy and Institute for Integrated Behavioral Health.
- Support for capital project funding and predictability in the process.

XIII. Other Business

There was no other business to come before the board.

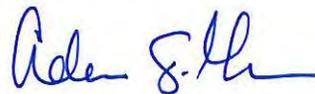
XIV. Executive Session

There was no need for an executive session.

XV. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Adam Green
Secretary of the Board of Trustees

Approved by the Board of Trustees at its February 20, 2026 meeting.