

Staff Advisory Committee
September 19, 2024 – 1:30 p.m.

Members Present: Brian Allen, Christa Blair, Eric Carlile, Emily Disbrow, Joni Gilmore, Liam Harder, Melanie Mabrey, Amy McCoy, Kim Meredith (proxy for Joyce Arnold-Hesson), Lisa Norsworthy, Lisa Rice, Catherine Warren, Denette Way

Members Absent: Peggy Nettenstrom, Gary Stafford, Noel Stojkov, Deborah Yu

Others Present: President Oldham, Kevin Vedder, Lee Wray, Aleta Cannon

Summary:

Approved Agenda

Approved May 2, 2024 minutes

Reviewed Staff Day

Nomination for Vice Chair

Discussed Speeding on Campus

Comments by the President

Proceedings:

Eric Carlile called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm. Joni Gilmore motioned to approve the agenda for September 19, 2024. Jennifer Dewar seconded. Motion APPROVED.

Melanie Mabrey motioned to approve the May 2, 2024, minutes. Catherine Warren seconded. Motion APPROVED.

Carlile explained that he would be delivering an update on how Staff Day 2024 had gone, and this would be his last meeting as chair. Lisa Rice would be taking over as chair of Staff Advisory Committee for the 2024-2025 year. He explained that a new vice-chair would be nominated during the meeting. Carlile suggested that since some previous members had rotated off the committee and new ones would be joining, introductions would be helpful. Each committee member and resource person introduced themselves.

Carlile updated the committee on Staff Day 2024 feedback. He felt that overall improvements had been made and the committee was more prepared, particularly with the ordering of the food. Liam Harder stated that as an attendee, he felt the check-in process worked well. It was suggested to send the Staff Day survey results to the entire committee for review.

Carlile mentioned one of the main takeaways from the feedback was that the time of year had not worked well for some but did for others. Feedback on food also suggested that more options, such as gluten free, would have been better. Some had mentioned that the drawing for the prizes had taken too long, and that people should not have received more than one prize. The number generator for the prizes can be adjusted and an easier option could be utilized for future Staff Days. Lisa Rice noted that people were impressed with the number of prizes that were given away, but they also mentioned that everyone should get a prize. The parking permit garnered interest and may increase attendance next year. Mabrey explained that a parking permit may not be possible to get again next year. Carlile noted that everyone, particularly the subcommittee, did extra work to make Staff Day successful and make the planning easier. As the time approaches, a subcommittee would be established again to plan for next year's Staff Day. Overall, the feedback was positive for this year.

Carlile explained that nominations for a new vice chair were needed. Each member was given a slip of paper to write the name of their nominee on. Lisa Norsworthy asked if anyone was ineligible to be nominated, and Aleta Cannon explained that members whose terms were expiring at the end of the year were not eligible. Eric Carlile, Joni Gilmore, and Lisa Norsworthy were not eligible to be nominated. After votes were counted, Melanie Mabrey was nominated and accepted the position of vice chair for 2024-2025. Carlile thanked everyone for making his term as chair a good one.

Rice explained that the seventh street side of campus near Mahler Avenue had been experiencing issues with people speeding. Staff members that parked at Bell Hall have had issues crossing the street safely and have almost been hit multiple times by drivers at the four-way stop. Rice explained that two weeks ago, she had witnessed a driver go through the four-way speeding and then had to come to an abrupt stop. She asked if this was a City of Cookeville or Tennessee Tech street, and Lee Wray confirmed it was a city street. Mabrey stated she would meet with Chief Nichols and send information regarding the issue to the University Police officers. She explained that she would also reach out to City of Cookeville police to see what they could do to help monitor the area. University Police had also received complaints regarding speeding on campus.

Warren noted that speeding had been a safety concern behind Jere Whitson building as well. A staff member had called University Police and they said it was a City of Cookeville issue, and when they called City of Cookeville, they were informed that it was a University Police issue. The yield sign near the area had not seemed to be effective. Warren suggested that a crosswalk would help cut down on the issue. President Oldham asked where the crosswalk would go, and if it would need to cross the road to the new Soul Craft coffee shop. Warren said yes, and President Oldham explained that it might not be possible but that it could be checked on. The merging traffic would make it difficult to do.

Harder mentioned that biking on campus, especially in the Mahler Avenue area, was also dangerous due to speeding. He suggested a speed monitoring sign. Mabrey explained that University Police did not own a useable speed monitoring sign, but she would ask City of Cookeville if one could be borrowed. President Oldham noted that these conversations were ongoing with the City of Cookeville and improvements would continue to be made.

Jennifer Dewar mentioned that a reminder to students in Tech Times regarding bike and scooter safety on campus would be helpful. Students on bikes and scooters needed to obey traffic laws. Mabrey explained that University Police was working on a bike safety program, and it was a priority. Carlile mentioned that he would be able to assist with information and resources for the program if needed, as he participated in a biking program.

President Oldham explained to the committee that fall semester was off to a great start. There were 2,006 first-time freshmen and this year marked three years in a row of a 2,000 or greater freshman class total. Total enrollment was above 10,500 overall which was a four percent increase. Retention rates were good at 78% for first year students and Presidential Scholars at 88%. The Presidential Scholarship program had been successful, it was an expense leading to a return for students. The program was aggressively monitored to ensure it was working well.

Tennessee Tech joined FirstGen Forward Network, which is a nation-wide effort to support first-generation student success. Tennessee Tech continued to have a population of first-generation students on campus. This was Dr. Polk-Johnson's effort to support this group of students that tended to be on the lower end of retention. This would not only support their retention but overall retention.

The Nuclear Engineering program has had eighteen students enrolled, which is double the number expected. Research was at an all-time high the past year, with funding of \$46,000,000. The Wings Up 100 event was this week and recognized researchers bringing in \$100,000 in research funding. There were forty-seven people recognized, which accounted for 10% of the permanent faculty. Ten individuals had brought in \$1,000,000 or more in research funding. The campus benefited from this funding and competitive research, as it helped with indirect costs such as recurring costs of the institution and provided reputational benefits. The research had also made a difference in people's lives.

The compensation study implementation was continuing, with phase two completed at the beginning of fiscal year 2025. Primary changes to job classifications and changes to get employees to the minimum of their new classifications had been made. The compensation plan had helped to make compensation on campus more competitive, ensure benchmarking was done appropriately, and job structure was correct. Phase two for faculty would begin in October 2024 with the revised budget. Faculty salary inversions were critical. Progress on the compensation study would be reported to the Board of Trustees at the next meeting on Thursday, September 26, 2024, and the information would be made public. Overall staff salaries were within five percent of their medians, which was great progress. Most faculty were at median as well. President Oldham thanked everyone for their patience with this process.

Oldham explained that for capital projects, the projects that created the biggest nuisance were nearly complete. In about two years, the new stadium would be completed. Almost \$16,00,000 was fundraised last year, making it the third biggest year in Tennessee Tech history. Almost \$9,000,000 was raised over the last five years for the Ashraf Islam Engineering Building. This was one of the largest amounts raised for a single project in Tennessee Tech history.

Tennessee Tech continued to have the top return on investment of any Tennessee public university and the highest average starting salaries for graduates. The Golden Eagle Marching Band was at a record membership of 218. There would be a home football game on Saturday, September 21, 2024, against Tennessee State University. Coach Wilder brought a lot of energy and knowledge to the team.

Board of Trustees member Barry Wilmore was still in space and doing well. President Oldham had spoken to him a few times and he was in good spirits. The next Board of Trustees meeting was in a week. Committee meetings would be in the morning starting at 8:00 AM and at 1:30 PM the board would meet. It could be attended in person or streamed online.

Carlile asked if the home football games would be at the stadium. President Oldham responded that yes, they would, just not on the west side. Home games would be during the day since there were fewer lights at night. The new stadium should be open for the fall 2026 season with less seating, but premium seating and club level. The track would be relocated by the women's softball field. The infield of the track would be utilized by intramurals.

Lisa Norsworthy asked when the conversion of Foster Hall to the green space would be completed. President Oldham explained that would happen once Johnson Hall renovations were finished. There was no full design yet, but Oldham had asked Facilities about a landscape masterplan. He wanted to bring in a landscape architect to help create a masterplan rather than addressing projects one at a time.

Mabrey asked when employees who were only at their minimum compensation could expect to be at their median. Kevin Vedder explained that was not planned yet but they were looking at it. Mabrey explained that she had heard that employees who had been on campus a longer amount of time were concerned that newer employees were making more than them. Vedder explained that they would be planning for that and would take tenure and job experience into consideration, but a plan had not yet been established.

Vedder mentioned the Talon Town Hall meeting from earlier in the week and that a recording was posted to the Talon website. There were positive changes coming with this implementation. The website and recording could be found by searching "Talon" on Tennessee Tech's website. The Business Partner Network (BPN) consisted of employees across campus who worked at the department levels on finances and would be a useful resource to talk to. One of the biggest upcoming changes would be biweekly pay for clerical and support staff and student workers. There would be twenty-six pay period instead of twelve. There would be more town halls and communication regarding those changes coming. There would be two months with three pay periods, and there would be no deductions in the third pay period. These payroll changes would be coming in January 2026. Kim Meredith asked if the biweekly pay was optional, and Vedder explained it was not. Talon Talks and Talon Tracks newsletters would be good to review. Overall, this would be a positive benefit to clerical and support staff as well as student workers.

There were no Other Such Matters.

Dennette Way motioned to adjourn. Harder seconded. Adjourned at 2:25 pm.

Documents on file:

Agenda, September 19, 2024

Minutes, May 2, 2024

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