

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AT MARTIN
ADVISORY BOARD
MINUTES

The University of Tennessee at Martin Advisory Board convened on January 24, 2025, at the UT Martin campus, in the Boling University Center, Room 206 AB, with Chairman Art Sparks presiding. The meeting commenced at 1:00 PM CST.

I. Roll Call

The meeting opened with a roll call led by Secretary Jake Bynum, who confirmed the presence of the following members: Art Sparks, Chairman, Hal Bynum, John Woolfolk, Dan Strasser, Dr. Dan McDonough - Faculty Senate Representative, and Chayil Watkins – Student Representative (attended virtually)

Dr. Tonya Reynoldson was absent. With six of the seven members present, Chairman Sparks confirmed that a quorum was established, allowing the meeting to proceed.

II. Opening Remarks

Chancellor Freeman provided opening comments highlighting the significance of this meeting as the strategic plan would be presented. He noted that the board would receive several important updates, including positive enrollment indicators for spring, capital outlay projects, athletic affairs, and the 2025-2030 strategic plan. The Chancellor expressed excitement about entering the design phase for the new residence hall to replace Browning Hall, joking that former residents could "come get a brick" when demolition begins. He mentioned anticipating the governor's budget and hoping the business building would be included in the funding. He noted that if unsuccessful, they would "keep charging forward" to secure this needed project. Freeman also expressed concern about changing dynamics in NCAA athletics, specifically mentioning the settlement agreement, NIL (Name, Image, Likeness), and transfer portal issues. He concluded by noting his excitement about the innovative and entrepreneurial strategic plan that would guide UTM from 2025 to 2030, mentioning that it includes 24 "big, hairy, audacious goals," a term borrowed from UT System President Randy Boyd.

III. Approval of the Minutes from the Previous Meeting

Chairman Sparks proceeded to the approval of the minutes from the September 20, 2024, Advisory Board meeting. The minutes had been distributed to the board

members in advance of the meeting for their review. Sparks asked if there were any corrections or amendments to be made. Hearing none, the floor was opened for a motion to approve.

Motion to approve the minutes: Hal Bynum

Second: Dan McDonough

Vote: Approved unanimously by roll call vote

IV. 2025 Legislative Outlook

Tim Sigler, Assistant Vice President of Government Relations and Advocacy for the UT System, provided a comprehensive legislative update via telephone. He began with his background, noting his bachelor's degree from MTSU and 14 years in the Tennessee General Assembly, including five years as a research analyst for the Senate Finance Ways and Means Committee and five years as legislative advisor to the Lieutenant Governor before joining UT in 2020. Sigler reported that three committee chairs had lost seats to primary challengers, with new chairs appointed: Representative Gary Hicks (Rogersville) for House Finance Committee, Representative Justin Lafferty (Knoxville) for House Government Operations Committee, and Senator Dawn White (Murfreesboro) for Senate Education Committee. He noted no changes to UTM's campus representatives, with Senator Stevens and Representative Darby continuing to serve, and mentioned the General Assembly would have 12 new members this year. Sigler outlined the legislative timeline, beginning with the 114th General Assembly on January 14, 2025, the bill filing deadline on February 6, the governor's budget release in February, and final budget approval expected in April. He explained that approximately 2,000 bills are filed each legislative session, and the UT Government Relations team reviews every bill, typically tracking about one-third as potentially impacting the university. Their goal is to ensure no bills with a significant negative impact on university operations, finances, or reputation pass.

Sigler described the budget landscape, noting that state revenues are leveling off after exponential growth, with the State Funding Board setting projections of 1-2% growth. This has caused budget decision-makers to have decreased appetite for recurring increases or large one-time expenditures. A special session announced for the following week would address disaster relief (particularly for Hurricane Helene), school choice (with \$144 million already budgeted), and franchise and excise tax reforms. Despite the constraints, Sigler emphasized that the state remains in good financial health, and the administration is expected to continue using recurring revenue to fund non-recurring expenses, which creates opportunities for non-recurring proposals. He provided important context for UTM's capital requests, highlighting that Tennessee job growth for positions requiring a bachelor's degree or higher increased by 361,000 from 2008-2021, significantly outpacing other sectors. Tennessee's economy is increasingly reliant on a highly educated workforce. UT has

set an aggressive enrollment goal system-wide to reach 71,000 by 2030, with all four undergraduate campuses increasing enrollment by 4-8% in the past year.

Regarding infrastructure challenges, Sigler pointed out that nearly one-third of UT's buildings (298 structures) are over 60 years old, with 60 over a century old. The UT system has a \$1.3 billion deferred maintenance backlog, state maintenance investment has decreased by 60% since FY21, and \$3.7 billion in capital needs have been identified over the next decade. He described UT's capital budget priorities, beginning with the UTK Chemistry Building (\$165.2 million), which serves 127 programs and 30% of UTK's undergraduate population, with 17,000 square feet of lab space becoming unusable. The second priority is the UT Martin College of Business and Global Affairs Building (\$57.5 million), the only public business school in rural West Tennessee, currently housed in a 70-year-old converted residence hall facing challenges with flooding, mold, asbestos, lack of ADA accommodations, insufficient classroom space, and outdated instructional systems. Accreditors have flagged deterioration as a liability for re-accreditation. Third is the UT Institute of Agriculture College of Veterinary Medicine (\$28 million), one of only 32 such colleges in the U.S. and the sole public provider of veterinary education in Tennessee, currently limited to 100 seats despite 1,500 qualified candidates due to space constraints. Given the capital needs and recent patterns of state investment, Sigler noted that UT has begun exploring the potential of bonding academic facilities with the state.

Turning to operating requests for FY26, Sigler mentioned full funding for the outcomes-based funding formula, \$1.7 million recurring to reset UT Southern's base appropriation (noting enrollment has increased by 50% since acquisition in 2021), \$3 million recurring for UTIA Precision Agriculture Initiative to address projected loss of 2 million acres of farmland over the next three years, and a new operating increase model for medical non-formula units (including UT Health Science Center and UT College of Veterinary Medicine). Sigler concluded by highlighting expected legislative trends: school choice (governor's plan returning in special session), financial aid (utilizing sports wagering revenue), campus safety and firearms (likely legislation to increase presence of firearms on campus), value of degree (increased focus on measuring outcomes from degree programs), accreditation (potential policy efforts following Florida's legislation requiring institutions to sue accreditors under certain circumstances), and R&D competitiveness (Department of Economic Development proposing funds to support R&D partnerships between companies and universities). In response to questions, Sigler mentioned legislation regarding the segregation of bathrooms in student housing as a concern being monitored. He also confirmed that the governor's budget would likely be released in early February.

V. Capital Projects Update

Petra McPhearson, Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration, provided a detailed update on current and future capital projects. She began with current initiatives, describing the Hall Moody Administration Building System Upgrade (\$14

million), a state-funded capital maintenance program addressing HVAC, plumbing, electrical, and data systems that combines two funding phases with expected completion in early 2026. McPhearson discussed the TEST Hub (Tennessee Entrepreneurial Science and Technology Hub) (\$19 million), a state-funded project partnering with T-CAT Mackenzie, Dyersburg State, UT Martin, and industry, with a groundbreaking scheduled for late February 2025 and anticipated completion in 2027. She outlined athletic facilities improvements (donor and campus funded), including the baseball field project underway with completion targeted before the first game on February 19, 2025, and the Student Life Gym Project converting to a weight room for football with completion expected by Summer 2025. McPhearson also mentioned safety and security enhancements (\$1.5 million remaining funds), a state-funded project in two phases addressing control access, door hardware, video surveillance, cameras, and lighting, with expected completion by June 2025.

Regarding funding requests, McPhearson emphasized the College of Business Building (\$57.5 million) as UTM's top priority, currently number eight on the THEC list, awaiting the governor's budget announcement in February. She discussed the new residence hall to replace Browning Hall, noting bond funding approval, ongoing designer selection processes, and a target completion for Fall 2027-2028. Looking to future priorities, McPhearson highlighted the Cattle Education and Reproduction Laboratory (CERL) (\$4-6 million) with a program document completed, which would develop beef cattle teaching and demonstration areas, including a classroom, laboratory, handling facilities, and a covered arena. She mentioned that the Student Health and Counseling Center (\$5-8 million) planned to replace the facility built in 1959, with the program document near completion. Additional projects on the 2021-2031 Campus Master Plan include vet tech building expansion and grave stables replacement, student support service additions/upgrades, EPS building additions and renovations, site enhancements (outdoor spaces, gateway, trail connection), and Fine Arts building hall and theater renovation. McPhearson detailed maintenance needs, including HVAC replacements and upgrades, building envelope projects (Perry Children's Center siding, Humanities, Chris Paul), North plant chiller replacement, fire alarms, elevators, storm and sewer lines, and Clement Hall Phase Three. She concluded that state funding will help address needs, but the university might need to explore alternative funding for critical infrastructure if state funding is insufficient. In response to a question from Chairman Sparks about the timeline for the residence hall, McPhearson indicated completion was targeted for Fall 2027-2028. Chairman Sparks also asked about accreditation issues related to the College of Business building. They were assured that approval of the new building would remedy any facility-related concerns raised during AACSB accreditation.

VI. Athletics Update

Kurt McGuffin, Vice Chancellor for Athletics, provided a comprehensive update on athletics achievements and NCAA developments. He highlighted athletic accomplishments, including the football program's four back-to-back winning seasons with two NCAA FCS playoff appearances, the OVC men's basketball championship

(making UTM one of only four Division I teams to win both football and men's basketball championships in their respective leagues), women's basketball NCAA tournament appearance, the new stunt team (recently classified as an NCAA emerging sport), fifth place in the OVC Commissioner's Cup (highest in institution's history), and two students (Jonathan Zuanus from Men's Golf and Izzy Patterson from Soccer) receiving OVC Student Athlete of the Year awards. McGuffin reported impressive academic achievements, with 287 students on the AD's honor roll for Fall 2024, 73 students with perfect 4.0 GPAs in Fall 2024 (a potential record if maintained in spring), and an overall GPA of 3.33 for 467 eligible athletes (tying institutional record), representing significant improvement from below 3.0 GPA before Fall 2018.

McGuffin detailed completed facility projects, including the men's basketball locker room (completed first week of playing season), women's basketball locker room (completed pre-COVID), baseball hitting facility (completed summer 2024), baseball field upgrades and bullpen renovation, fence installation in progress (targeting February 19 completion), and the Student Life Center weight room conversion (nearly doubling space from 7,100 to 13,000 square feet). Regarding fundraising, McGuffin noted a goal of at least \$2 million annually, with significant facility project funding in 2023, including a land estate gift, supporting 467 student-athletes (approximately 170 on full scholarships) and \$5.27 million in outside dollars (from parents, Pell grants, etc.) supporting students.

The most significant portion of McGuffin's presentation addressed the impact of the NCAA House settlement. He explained this settlement addresses NIL (Name, Image, Likeness) from 2016 forward, with 40% of payments coming from Power 4 Conferences (Big 12, Big 10, SEC, ACC) and 60% from all other Division I schools, including UTM. The financial impact means UTM's NCAA distribution (\$1.1 million) will be reduced by approximately \$280,000-\$300,000 annually for 10 years. Power conference schools may pay current student-athletes roughly \$20 million annually through a revenue-sharing formula. Implications for UTM could include potential roster limits if UTM opts into the settlement, with all sports becoming "equivalency sports" rather than having scholarship limits. This would mean the football roster could be limited to 105 (currently at 128), baseball limited to 34 (down from as many as 47), and men's basketball limited to 15 (currently 17), potentially resulting in the loss of approximately 42 walk-on student-athletes. McGuffin noted that UTM is currently monitoring the situation before deciding whether to opt in, suggesting "patience is key" and that most OVC schools share similar budget constraints. He expressed concern about reduced opportunities for freshmen since COVID and the impact of the transfer portal, mentioning that UTM lost five defensive linemen to larger programs with NIL money after their successful seasons. In response to questions, McGuffin confirmed that UTM does have a third-party NIL collective (one of only three in the OVC) providing modest support to student-athletes (under \$50,000 total). Chairman Sparks questioned why schools like Wisconsin don't have to compensate UTM when they recruit our successfully developed players, noting this seems unfair to smaller programs that invest in

developing talent.

VII. Enrollment and Retention Update

Destin Tucker and Brad Baumgardner presented detailed information on enrollment and retention. Tucker reported Spring 2025 enrollment (as of January 23, 2025) at 7,092 total students (approximately 10% increase year-over-year), with undergraduate enrollment up 9%, graduate enrollment increasing for the first time in several years, returning undergraduate students up 5.5%, first-time graduate students increased, dual enrollment up 22% (working with 59 high schools throughout state and region), and transfer students up 18.5%. Tucker noted the addition of four new schools for Spring: First Assembly Christian School (Memphis), Lebanon High School, McKinsey High School, and Union City High School. Baumgardner explained the distinction between key terms: persistence (Fall to Spring continuation or December graduation), retention (Fall to Fall continuation), and progression (students achieving the following classification at 30/60/90 hours). He highlighted a record 77% retention for first-time, full-time freshmen in the previous year (highest in the institution's history), with Fall 2024 to Spring 2025 persistence rate 2.3 percentage points ahead of the last year, and all undergraduate headcount, persistence, retention, and progression metrics ahead of the previous year.

Baumgardner attributed these improvements to increased funding and personnel for student support, QEP and Title III initiatives bearing fruit, scholarship increases, revisions to retention metrics, general education and catalog updates, growing emphasis on semester-to-semester retention, improved data definitions and tracking, and campus-wide collaboration. Tucker outlined Fall 2025 enrollment goals and strategies, targeting a 5% enrollment increase (to reach 10,000 students by 2030), with first-year admitted students up nearly 10%. She noted they are monitoring yield rates with the implementation of the Common App (seeing lower completion rates compared to the native application). She described Future Skyhawk receptions planned in Dyersburg, Jackson, Martin, Memphis, and Nashville, a new housing application system, transfer recruitment (early in the cycle), graduate student recruitment centralization (new application launching soon), and international student recruitment initiatives. These include a partnership with Better Ways Consulting, with a goal of 5% international students by 2030, and planned recruitment trips to Oman, Dubai, India, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia. Tucker mentioned strategic enrollment initiatives, including centralized operations and communications, ongoing international recruitment strategy development, strategic enrollment planning process refresh (following up on 2019 plan), and working groups developing new proposals.

Regarding questions about UTM's success compared to peers, Tucker indicated that while spring numbers aren't widely shared, most institutions saw slight increases in the fall, though likely not matching UTM's strong performance. Board member Dan McDonough recognized that sometimes recruitment events yield unexpected benefits, citing a conversation at last year's Jackson event that led to alumni raising \$35,000 for agricultural equipment. When asked how UTM is achieving record enrollment growth

against demographic trends, Tucker attributed success to bringing recruitment operations in-house (replacing the previous EAB partnership), allowing more targeted marketing while saving money, combined with strong retention efforts. Baumgardner added that creating his position, focused explicitly on retention, has made a difference, along with campus-wide collaboration. Board member Dan Strasser asked about plans to support international students with English language needs. Tucker explained that while there are no immediate plans to reactivate the former ESL program, admission requirements include English proficiency standards. Baumgardner noted the ESL program was suspended rather than eliminated and could be reactivated if needed. Chancellor Freeman added that as the international student population grows, they would assess needs and potentially add an English instructor with ESL background once a critical mass of students is reached.

VIII. Approval of 2025-2030 Strategic Plan

Chancellor Freeman presented the strategic plan for 2025-2030 titled "Watch Us Soar," describing an eight-month development process involving 265 individual contributors through SWOT analysis, focus groups, surveys, and town halls. The extensively vetted plan with campus and community input awaits Advisory Board approval, followed by a review by the Board of Trustees in February. Freeman outlined the plan's structure, built around four major themes: People (employees, students, external stakeholders), Places (physical environment, infrastructure, virtual spaces), Achievement (academic success and leadership development), and Partnerships (higher education partners, business/industry, alumni, donors). The plan contains five goals with 24 total strategies, each with specific targets and metrics, falling into three categories: improvements to existing initiatives, new developments with no current baseline, and recently started initiatives requiring refinement.

Freeman detailed each of the five goals, beginning with sustainable enrollment growth by investing resources to attract and support a wide range of learners, including creating a comprehensive strategic enrollment plan targeting 5% annual growth and reducing performance disparities for the highest retention risk groups (Pell-eligible, first-generation, veteran/military students). The second goal involves enhanced institutional reputation through exceptional education and service, creating a supportive learning environment through faculty training, with a Center for Teaching and Learning targeting 50% faculty participation and supporting innovative teaching approaches. The third goal focuses on enhanced physical and virtual spaces for future learners and educators, with a housing plan addressing aging facilities, maintaining a 95% occupancy rate, increasing first-year residential retention from 76.5% to 82%, increasing overall resident retention to 88%, and expanding bed capacity to accommodate enrollment growth. The fourth goal reaffirms commitment to West Tennessee through strengthened partnerships, encouraging faculty-led projects addressing complex regional issues, cultivating a network of advocates and supporters, establishing advisory boards for each college to maintain industry connections, and preparing graduates for current and future workforce needs. The fifth goal promotes faculty and staff achievement related to the university's mission,

expanding recognition programs for student excellence, creating a badging system for employee training completion, producing an annual report on faculty scholarship and creative activity, and developing career ladders for staff positions across the university.

Chancellor Freeman emphasized that the plan is entrepreneurial, innovative, and creative, with ownership across the campus rather than being a top-down directive. He concluded by stating that "UTM is a first-rate, first-class institution that has a transformational impact on the lives of students, faculty, and staff," and that "We are the University of Tennessee at Martin. Skyhawks. Watch us soar." In response to a question from Johnny Woolfolk about housing capacity for 10,000 students, Chancellor Freeman acknowledged that beyond the new Browning Hall replacement, UTM would need help from the surrounding community. He mentioned ongoing discussions with private developers about investing in the area based on projected enrollment growth.

Motion to approve the strategic plan: Johnny Woolfolk

Second: Dan McDonough

Vote: Approved unanimously by roll call vote

IX. Approval 2026 Meeting Schedule

The board reviewed proposed meeting dates for May and September 2025 and 2026, which are included in the meeting materials.

Motion to approve the meeting dates: Hal Bynum

Second: Dan McDonough

Vote: Approved unanimously by roll call vote

X. Comment by the Chancellor

Chancellor Freeman provided several announcements in his closing comments, including the upcoming Board of Trustees meeting in Martin on February 27-28, 2025, with the strategic plan presentation scheduled for February 28 at 10:00 AM in the ballroom. He mentioned the dinner planned with Board of Trustees members and Advisory Board, a basketball game scheduled for the evening of February 27, and the TEST Hub groundbreaking on February 28 at 11:30 AM. Freeman noted that FY26 budget planning is in progress with division heads submitting priorities, with budget recommendations and potential tuition increases to be presented at the May meeting. He highlighted the successful MLK Day service project that packed 20,000 meals for the homeless with nearly 300 volunteers from the university and community,

expressing pride in this demonstration of community commitment.

XI. Closing Remarks

In his closing remarks, Chairman Sparks acknowledged that Johnny Woolfolk would leave the board as his replacement had been identified. He thanked Woolfolk for his excellent service and noted he would be sorely missed, but welcome back anytime. Chairman Sparks encouraged board members to promote UT Martin in their communities, share information about positive developments, and advocate for the College of Business building with state officials. Chayil Watkins suggested organizing a meet-and-greet event between board members and students to increase campus awareness of the Advisory Board. Chairman Sparks supported the idea, suggesting it could be held before a future board luncheon.

XII. Adjournment

With no further business,

Motion to adjourn: Hal Bynum

Second: Johnny Woolfolk

Vote: Approved unanimously by roll call vote