

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MINUTES

November 13, 2020  
Johnson City, Tennessee

The quarterly meeting of the East Tennessee State University Board of Trustees was held at 1 p.m. on Friday, November 13 via teleconference call due to extraordinary circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak. The meeting was livestreamed to allow individuals to attend remotely.

**I. Call to Order**

Chair Scott Niswonger called the meeting to order at 1 p.m.

In his opening remarks, Chair Niswonger spoke about the forthcoming virtual graduation ceremony scheduled for December 12 and congratulated the Class of 2020 for achieving degrees this semester.

Chair Niswonger applauded ETSU's continued efforts to fight the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Recently, ETSU Health launched a COVID-19 test collection site that delivers test results within 24 hours.

Lastly, Chairman Niswonger noted several achievements since the previous meeting:

- Top 16 finish for the Esports Varsity Team in the game Overwatch;
- Dedication of the Dr. Patricia Robertson Pride Center located in the D.P. Culp Student Center;
- \$2.5 million grant to support Access ETSU program for individuals with intellectual disabilities;
- \$2.19 million grant from the National Institutes of Health was awarded to Dr. Chuanfu Li from the Department of Biomedical Sciences, Quillen College of Medicine, to study cardiovascular dysfunction in sepsis.

**II. Roll Call**

Secretary Green provided special instructions for telephonic meetings. Because Trustees participated via Zoom, votes were taken by roll call. In accordance with Tennessee Code § 8-44-108 section (c) (3), Secretary Green asked Trustees two questions. First, he asked each Trustee if he or she could clearly hear and participate in the meeting, and second, if any other persons were present in the room with them. All Trustees answered both questions with yes and no, respectively.

The following Trustees were present:

Janet Ayers  
Steve DeCarlo

Virginia Foley  
Dorothy Grisham  
Linda Latimer  
Scott Niswonger  
Austin Ramsey  
Melissa Steagall-Jones  
Kelly Wolfe

Secretary Green said he did not detect a physical quorum present; however, a quorum existed by the inclusion of members participating by electronic means. In accordance with Tennessee Executive Order 65 permitting safe, open and transparent public meetings by electronic means, the meeting was necessary for the following reasons:

- Business critical decisions for the operations of the institution are slated for this meeting such as the consideration of a modified Spring 2021 Academic Calendar, October Budget Revisions, the Title IX Rule, and updates on ETSU 125 Chapter 2, KPI's, and ETSU's COVID-19 Response;
- Due to the COVID-19 virus outbreak and subsequent recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as well as Governor Bill Lee, social distancing measures and a limit on group gatherings are being observed.

Secretary Green said that for these reasons, he contended that participation by a quorum of the Board members by electronic or other means of communication is necessary. He then asked Chairman Niswonger for a motion and a roll call vote for a determination on the necessity of holding the meeting. Trustee Foley made a motion, followed by a second from Trustee Latimer. All Trustees provided affirmative votes that the meeting had a necessity to proceed.

### **III. Public Comments**

Because the meeting was conducted virtually, Chairman Niswonger said public comments could not be received in the traditional manner. Therefore, those who would like to submit comments for the Board to receive were encouraged to email trustees@etsu.edu.

### **IV. Approval of Minutes from September 18, 2020**

Trustee Steagall-Jones made a motion to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Trustee Foley and were unanimously approved by roll call vote.

### **V. Report from the Academic, Research & Student Success Committee**

In her report, Chair Latimer said the committee took action on the revised spring 2021 academic calendar presented by Dr. Wilsie Bishop, which is part of the consent agenda. Dr. Bishop joined Dr. Don Samples to present an information item regarding the letter of notification for the establishment of a master's in science in orthotics and prosthetics that will be one of only a few programs in the nation. The committee also heard a presentation on the reorganization of the Research Foundation by Dr. Bill

Duncan and Professor David Golden. This led to a very active discussion around the impact of private/public partnerships on regionalism, Chair Latimer said. Lastly, Drs. Bill Block and David Linville provided an update on the Ballad Health Coordinating Council and there was discussion around the community's perception of ETSU's integration with the health system as written in the certificate of public advantage (COPA).

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

Chair Steagall-Jones reported that the committee approved its charter, which is included in the consent agenda. Ms. Becky Lewis also reviewed the responsibilities of members of the audit committee, briefed the committee on audits, and reviewed the current status of the internal recommendation log and the audit plan for fiscal year 2021. Chair Steagall-Jones said the remote environment did not negatively impact the audit schedule. The committee also approved the Internal Audit Department operating expense report for fiscal year 2021.

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

In his report, Chair DeCarlo said the committee approved the October 2020 budget revisions, which are included in the consent agenda. Dr. BJ King reported on the unaudited financial statements. The exit conference will be scheduled soon and reports will be mailed directly to trustees once completed. Chair DeCarlo said the committee reviewed the university's composite financial index (CFI). The ratios demonstrate the continued financial health and stability of the university, he added. Dr. King also provided the tuition transparency report to demonstrate how tuition revenues were used and the effect on student cost of attendance in compliance with the Tuition Transparency Act. The committee also received a quarterly report from Dr. King on agreements of \$250,000 or greater. Lastly, Ms. Pam Ritter reported on the ETSU Foundation's performance in fiscal year 2020 and the activities ongoing in 2021.

#### **VIII. Consent Agenda**

Chair Niswonger noted that the Letter of Notification Regarding the Establishment a Master's of Science in Orthotics and Prosthetics (item B) was removed from the consent agenda because the Board previously approved the Letter of Notification. This item was for information only.

- A. Modified Spring 2021 Academic Calendar**
- C. Audit Committee Minutes from October 21, 2020**
- D. Audit Committee Charter**
- E. October 2020 Budget Revisions**

Trustee Foley made a motion to adopt the consent agenda as presented without item B that was seconded by Trustee DeCarlo. The consent agenda was adopted following a unanimous roll call vote.

## **IX. Title IX Rule**

Dr. Mark Fulks recalled that the Board of Trustees previously approved the emergency rule that was established due to changes in the federal regulations. The new Title IX rules were released in May with an Aug. 14 deadline for implementation. The emergency rule that was previously approved by the Board of Trustees was filed with the Secretary of State by the deadline and became effective immediately upon the filing. The emergency rule is good for 180 days providing time for a formal rulemaking process, Dr. Fulks explained. The proposed rule before the Board for approval is the same rule except it is not an emergency rule, it is a formal rule, he said. This is the formal process to replace the emergency rule before the end of the 180 days. President Noland and Dr. Fulks will also present the emergency rule to the General Assembly.

Trustee Stegall-Jones made a motion to adopt the Title IX Rule as presented that was seconded by Trustee Wolfe. The motion was approved unanimously by means of a roll call vote.

## **X. ETSU 125 Chapter 2 & Strategic Plan/KPI Update**

Dr. Mike Hoff provided an overview of the KPI dashboard information, noting challenges with enrollment, which is a national phenomenon not unique to ETSU. However, there are successes in the quality of the students as well as numbers of transfers and graduate students, and out-of-state is trending in the right direction. Additionally, the dashboard represents a healthy institution in terms of student success. Dr. Hoff added that ETSU has made great strides in sponsored research, which is well on its way to the goal of \$60 million. He also pointed out the robust submission of funding proposals that will yield a higher level of funding throughout the institution. Next, he highlighted dollars raised through giving, which is already above the 2026 goal. Then, he focused on retention rate, which is the highest it has ever been and based on the trajectory could reach 85 percent by 2026. Graduation rates are improving across the board by gender and non-white population. Dr. Hoff said this is the highest point of student success in the institution's history as represented in the outcomes funding formula and the dashboard. ETSU's affordability is how we make our mark in higher education, Dr. Hoff stated.

The dashboard outlines fall 2020 data, but does not yet account for the reduction in staffing related to the implementation of the voluntary retirement incentive plan. Those numbers will be represented in future dashboards. Overall, the dashboard is in a better place than when it started, Dr. Hoff said. Aggressive goals were set, he continued, but it is encouraging to see all the work that faculty, staff, students and the institution have done and the support the Board of Trustees has provided is starting to pay off in a big way.

Trustee Foley asked about the faculty profile, if the percentage of tenure-track faculty compared to instructor and lecturer positions at ETSU has changed. Dr. Hoff said staffing is in flux due to educational demand as a result of the drop in enrollment. He will prepare a profile based on department and college to share with Trustees.

Next, Dr. Hoff spoke about the strategic plan, which is halfway through and some distance away from the Committee for 125, therefore it is time to make a revision. He then turned Trustees' attention to the continuous improvement chart found in the agenda packet. Any continuous improvement process includes closing the loop, which is what this year is about – reviewing what worked and what did not, Dr. Hoff explained. It is about celebrating what worked and providing changes and considering initiatives that align with our budget to continue what works and increase innovation. Overall, the purpose of this is to focus on the future, he said. COVID is an acute problem, he continued, but institutions also tend to be stuck in their ways. The more people we have talking about exciting opportunities at ETSU, the better.

As part of this process, external consultants are being engaged in the process to get an unbiased look, and focus groups and interviews are being held through the end of the semester. Dr. Hoff further noted that ETSU 125 Chapter II will engage heavily in a committee-based process to support our mission for our institution is to improve the lives of the people of this region and there are many ways we are doing this and more.

## **XI. ETSU COVID-19 Medical Response Team Update**

Dr. Bill Block reviewed a timeline and changes implemented by the university and ETSU Health since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In late February and early March, meetings began under the guidance of Mr. Jeremy Ross and a task force was developed to look at the latest information about the virus. Dr. Block said the group was notified March 5 of the first case in Tennessee. Less than a week later, the university made the decision to go virtual after spring break for two weeks with the hope of returning to in-person course delivery. Then, on March 12, Gov. Bill Lee declared a state of emergency and the NCAA canceled the basketball tournament. By March 20, Nashville surpassed 100 cases of COVID-19, the first death in the state was reported, and there were reports of students from Tusculum University returning from spring break with COVID-19, one of the first clusters in the region. By March 27 there were 1,000 active cases in Tennessee, Dr. Block said.

Work continued through the spring and into the summer to decrease density on campus and faculty converted all classes to virtual delivery through the end of the spring semester and staff worked remotely. A mask policy was instituted along with an effort to educate the campus community to explain why masks were important in stopping the spread of the disease, Dr. Block said. Virtual commencement events were organized for the first time ever and a lot of effort went toward acquiring PPE for clinical and learning environments as supply chains were not equipped to deal with the shock at the onset of the pandemic, he added.

On March 17, ETSU Health stood up the first mobile COVID testing site in the region and Dr. Jonathan Moorman was named to the Governor's Task Force on COVID-19 and continues to serve in that capacity. ETSU Health clinics also implemented telemedicine and student clerkships were suspended mid-March at the recommendation of AAMC and virtual learning environments were established until early July.

By July it was clear the virus was not going away and that a collaborative approach to managing the response was needed, Dr. Block noted. A Medical Response Team was established and Dr. Leigh Johnson was selected to lead the response for the university. Throughout the summer, meetings were held to discuss how to deliver educational content, the return of athletics and testing protocol, the return to students and moving to single occupancy housing, and arranging for food service and laundry for students in isolation and quarantine. There was continued emphasis on measures to prevent transmission such as signage reminding visitors to wear mask, practice physical distancing and use hand sanitizer stations.

ETSU Health has provided testing for athletes following NCAA protocols, medical students every 10-14 days, and a voluntary testing protocol on main campus to determine level of spread. Additionally, a COVID PCR testing site has been established at the Community Health Center behind Woodridge Hospital. Patients schedule their test online and receive results within 24 hours. Over 100 patients are being tested daily and the positive rate has been as high as 15 percent, Dr. Block said.

Preparations are underway for vaccine distribution as one of the vaccines may require freezer storage, he noted. Dr. Leigh Johnson will ensure protocols are in place to distribute the vaccine in the order recommended by the CDC and Tennessee Department of Health. Collaboration with Ballad Health continues and members of the Medical Response Team participate in their emergency operation calls, Dr. Block said.

Dr. Block shared current coronavirus statistics and the high number of deaths from the disease in comparison to deaths caused by vehicle accidents and flu. While there is a lot of tragedy, Dr. Block said there is a lot of promise because of all we have learned about the disease and we continue to work together as a medical community and university.

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

President Noland began his report to the Board of Trustees by offering thanks to members of the Board, as well as faculty and staff for their leadership as the campus worked through a diversity of issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, Dr. Noland commended the leadership of Dr. Bill Block and his team at ETSU Health as well as Jeremy Ross, Bill Rasnick and the Facilities staff for all of their work to ensure that proper precautions were taken to ensure that campus remained both open and safe.

Dr. Noland provided an enrollment update, detailing data at campus, state, and national levels. For Fall 2020, undergraduate enrollment at ETSU declined 3.3 percent while graduate enrollment remained constant in comparison to the prior year. Across the state, most institutions (minus UT-Knoxville) have experienced enrollment declines with several community colleges experiencing decreases in excess of 15 percent. As fewer students transition through the community college pipeline, ETSU may be adversely impacted due to our dependence upon transfer students. Additionally, enrollment projections indicate a disproportionate impact from COVID-19 on low-income students in Tennessee as less FAFSAs are being submitted by families with income below \$36,000. Analyzing the pipeline of high school students across the state will be important as ETSU embarks upon the work of the Committee for 125.2.

The President also provided information related to the university's budget landscape for 2020-21. He reviewed the outcomes formula process through which funds are distributed from the state. For 2020-21, higher education was held harmless from the budget reductions that were enacted across other units of state government. President Noland thanked Gov. Lee and members of the General Assembly for making this decision as other state agencies absorbed a 12 percent budget reduction for the current fiscal year. With respect to future budget cycles, Dr. Noland referenced the upcoming THEC budget process and the potential for outcomes formula funding as well as funding for the Academic Building (formerly Humanities Building) which is listed as the number five project on the THEC capital projects list.

In terms of legislative initiatives, ETSU is supportive of the THEC outcome formula, as well as THEC's request for enhanced operational support for Quillen College of Medicine, the Academic Building project and the THEC deferred maintenance projects list. Dr. Noland referenced the active negotiations between the University of Tennessee system and Martin Methodist College, noting that if the state of Tennessee approves this merger that he will actively seek operating support for the Gatton College of Pharmacy.

President Noland then provided an overview of initiatives for 2020-21:

- Search for Chief Academic Officer/Provost: chaired by Dr. Keith Johnson
- Search for College of Nursing Dean and Clemmer College Dean
- Operational procedures for Office of Provost – supporting initiatives for faculty and new programs
- Launching revised recruitment initiatives
- Ongoing review of the nature and function of internal and external marketing with the goal of amplifying the ETSU story
- Implementing changes to out-of-state tuition model; restructuring and strengthening advising
- Hired new Public Safety Chief
- Review nature, purpose and structure of ETSU Research Foundation

- Tightening and potentially integrating operations with Ballad Health under leadership of Dr. Bill Block
- Organizing staffing structure for Martin Center with full opening in 2021
- Continuation of capital campaign (\$90 million raised)
- Re-launch ETSU Elevates
- Launch of the Committee for 125.2 strategic visioning process

President Noland concluded his report by highlighting many of the individuals retiring this fall who chose to participate in the Voluntary Retirement Incentive Program. He acknowledged the impact that these individuals had on the university and thanked them for their commitment to our students and our mission of service to the people of the region.

**XIII. Other Business**

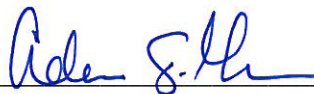
No other business was brought before the ETSU Board of Trustees.

**XIV. Executive Session**

**XV. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



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Adam Green  
Secretary of the Board of Trustees

Approved by the Board of Trustees at its February 19, 2021 meeting.