



THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE  
CAMPUS ADVISORY BOARD  
MINUTES  
November 20, 2020  
KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Advisory Board met virtually at 12:00 p.m. on Friday, November 20, 2020.

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair John Tickle called the meeting to order at 12:02 p.m.

**II. ROLL CALL**

Roll call of board members conducted with all present.

Members present: Mr. John Tickle, Chair, Ms. Karmen Jones, Mr. Beauvais Lyons, Ms. Alexia Poe, Mr. Tom Smith, Ms. Syreeta Vaughn

**III. OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR**

John Tickle welcomed the group to the meeting.

**IV. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

Tom Smith made a motion to approve the August 26, 2020 minutes provided the Secretary is authorized to make any necessary edits to correct spelling, grammatical, or format errors or other technical errors subsequently identified. Beauvais Lyons seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

**V. CHANCELLOR'S UPDATE**

**Dr. Donde Plowman, Chancellor**

Chancellor Donde Plowman provided an overview of several positive news items related to campus. The Haslam College of Business received a large financial gift from the Haslam family. The Tickle College of Engineering received a large financial gift from the Zeanah family for the new engineering building currently under construction. The Commission for Disabilities was established. The University received the 2020 Innovation and Economic Prosperity designation from the Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities.

Chancellor Plowman reviewed the COVID case data for the semester. When case counts increased at the beginning of the semester, restrictions were put in place to help reduce the number of cases. A great deal of work went into making necessary adjustments in our housing,

food service, programming, and community testing to help reduce the number of cases. Our Vice Chancellor for Research, Dr. Deb Crawford worked with some of our exceptional faculty members to convert their research labs to assist with testing. Communication around COVID was increased by implementing a weekly live update to provide the most current information to the campus and the community. Dr. Deborah Birx visited our campus this fall. She provided invaluable insight into testing and mitigation efforts. Dr. Birx also met with community leaders to share information and gain input from them. As a result of her visit our campus engaged other SEC schools in a research project focused on the number of required quarantine days. The Knox County Health Department has been wonderful to work with throughout the pandemic.

Three types of testing were used over the course of the semester – waste water testing, pooled saliva testing, and nasal swab testing to diagnose positive cases. The pooled saliva testing will be used for all students living in residence halls in the spring.

Mr. Tickle asked if any of the faculty tested positive over the semester. Chancellor Plowman reported very few members of the faculty reported testing positive. Social gatherings were an issue for some of our students. The students on campus were fantastic. Our freshman did not experience any of the normal first year experiences, but they were happy to be here and have acclimated well to the restrictions.

Students have been encouraged to plan for how to prepare in advance of returning home next week. The plan should include getting a free COVID test here on campus. Our SGA is helping distribute the test kits. Students are encouraged to get a flu shot and to honor the CDC guidelines for Thanksgiving celebrations.

Classes will resume on January 20<sup>th</sup>. Spring break was eliminated from the calendar. Our testing program will be robust in the spring. We will have several classes online in the spring. We have no reports of transmission in our classrooms. We will continue to adjust and adapt as new information becomes available throughout the spring semester.

Ms. Vaughn expressed her amazement at the resilience of our students. She questioned if there were students that will not return in the spring due to the disruptions caused by COVID. Ms. Kari Alldredge stated she would share more information on retention later in the meeting.

Mr. Smith questioned if the university tracked how many students have been hospitalized and if we have had any deaths. Chancellor Plowman stated we have not had any students hospitalized or pass away to our knowledge. We did have two students go to the hospital for a few hours of observation. We only receive this type of information when a hospital shares it with us.

## **VI. COVID-RELATED FINANCIAL UPDATE**

### **Chris Cimino, Senior Vice Chancellor, Finance and Administration**

Chris Cimino provided an overview of the fiscal impact of COVID on the campus. The gross impact as of October 1<sup>st</sup> is approaching \$118 million. This amount comprises housing and



dining refunds as well direct costs. We received state and federal funding to help address some of our expenses. The CARES Act provided \$9.6 million to the university and another \$9.6 million directly to students. The State Coronavirus Relief Funds provided \$1.1 million. The net fiscal impact is \$107 million. Mr. Tickle asked if athletic costs were included in the amount. Mr. Cimino confirmed they were included.

The areas with the largest fiscal impacts are athletics, housing, dining, and ancillaries that include arena events, parking, vending, and conferences. Total refunds and revenue reductions as of October 1, 2020 are \$95 million.

The list of costs associated with preparing our classrooms, cleaning supplies, PPE, testing, isolation housing, expanded health clinic operations, and preparations for fall was reviewed. The total expenses as of October 1, 2020 are \$22 million.

Mr. Cimino provided a summary of the CARES Act fund usage. The \$9.6 million received by the university was spent on laptops, hot spots, isolation housing, classroom reconfiguration to allow for social distancing, and online course development. The additional \$9.6 million went to more than 9,700 students. Ninety percent of the funds were direct block grants to students for emergency housing, childcare, food, and technology. Of the students receiving those funds, 75% were Pell eligible and 25% were not. The students were not required to apply for the funds. The Bursars Office and the Financial Aid office worked together to get the funds to the undergraduate and graduate students. The remaining 10% was placed in an emergency fund managed by our Dean of Students office to assist students in need that did not qualify for the CARES Act funds. Mr. Cimino reported 100% of the student funds have been distributed. The university funds will be completely distributed by the end of the year as we process our invoices.

An overview of spending reductions across the university were shared with the group. From March 1<sup>st</sup> to October 1<sup>st</sup> we saved \$24 million. When applied to the \$107 million net fiscal impact, it is reduced to \$83 million. Approximately half of the \$83 million is related to ancillaries such as athletics and the arena. Those areas will pay for those deficits as they ramp back up. The university will be responsible for approximately \$40 million, which we have cash reserves to cover. Chancellor Plowman expressed her appreciation of the work done in the past to develop a strong cash reserve. Mr. Cimino expressed his appreciation for the work done by Kari Alldredge and her team to grow enrollments. The team effort across the several departments have helped the university to weather the fiscal challenges to date.

Mr. Tickle questioned information he read related to pay cuts not being taken by our football coaching staff and a fine related to non-compliance with face masks on the sideline. Chancellor Plowman expressed her disappointment with both issues and shared the head coach stated more information would be forthcoming related to the assistant coaches and the pay cut.

Mr. Lyons asked what plans have been put in place to address the \$40 million deficit in athletics. Chancellor Plowman shared the SEC is proposing some assistance for campuses. The athletics department has worked on cost cutting efforts. The estimated shortfall is \$15-16 million. The

financing proposed by the SEC is based on future TV earnings. We would receive advanced payments based on years one and two and then receive decreased payments during years three and four. We will not use campus funds to loan athletics unless it becomes necessary. In that case, we have identified funds that are not state funds. The potential shortfall is approximately \$13 million. Mr. Lyons asked if there have been lessons learned during this time that would impact the new budget model process, which is currently on hold. Mr. Cimino said there are always lessons to be learned during a time such as this. Leadership recently met to restart the budget model work and begin to move forward quickly.

## **VII. FORMULA FUNDING BASICS**

### **Chris Cimino, Senior Vice Chancellor, Finance and Administration**

Chancellor Plowman asked Mr. Cimino to walk through the state appropriate formula funding. Mr. Cimino reported the normal formula funding is a network of complicated spreadsheets. He provided an overview of our budgeted revenue. Our appropriations make up 22% of our budget or \$271 million. We rely on our appropriations and we have experienced positive appropriations since the recession. The formula was based on enrollment only prior to 2010. The Complete College TN Act mandated a new formula. The Tennessee Higher Education Committee (THEC) established the Formula Review Committee to develop a formula based on core outcomes.

The five core outcomes are retention, number of degrees awarded, research and service, degrees per 100 FTE, and six-year graduation rate. Each outcome is given a weight, which can be adjusted every five years. We are nearing the third five-year period and will enter discussions with THEC on adjusting our weights in the near future.

Mr. Cimino provided the outcomes-based formula data we provided THEC from 2014-2019. THEC uses a rolling average over the past ten years to make the calculations. THEC is unable to fully fund the formula every year. We receive approximately 67% each year, which is consistent with all of the institutions across the state. Institutions are rewarded well for getting to the top of each outcome, but there is no additional funding for maintaining high performance. THEC has requested Governor Lee fund an additional \$36 million. If that happens, we would see additional funds. If it does not, our funding would be negatively impacted.

The group discussed the dynamics of how different institutions are able to advance their outcomes at different rates and maximize their portion of funding.

## **VIII. STUDENT SUCCESS**

### **Dr. Amber Williams, Vice Provost, Student Success**

Chancellor Plowman introduced Dr. Amber Williams to the group. Dr. Williams joined the University of Tennessee in January as the Vice Provost for Student Success.

Dr. Williams provided an overview of the Division of Student Success and work being conducted to support students. The mission of Student Success is the responsibility of everyone on campus to help each student maximize their strengths and understand how they contribute to their academic dreams, career paths, and personal well-being. Strategic goals for the division include enhancing academic support infrastructure, reimagining curricular and co-curricular efforts to elevate transformational, active learning, and create an environment that encourages healthy wellbeing. The Division of Student Success takes a strengths-based approach to accomplish these goals.

Dr. Williams shared benefits from approaching teaching and learning from a strengths-based approach. Three key components of a strengths-based mindset are confidence that our student scholars can learn at high levels, set high expectations to challenge our student scholars intellectually, and provide structures for every student scholar to reach their potential. Shifting from a deficit mindset to a strengths-based mindset will allow us to do the work to help each student graduate.

Data show that first generation students have a lower retention rate their first year than non-first-generation students. After the first year they rebound and retain at approximately the same rate as other students. Men of color have a low retention rate their first year and tend to continue to decline over time.

Ms. Alexia Poe asked for an explanation on the differences in retention between first generation students and men of color. Dr. Williams shared the three things that impact men of color differently are finances, climate or issues in and out of the classroom, and lack of confidence to enable them to reach out for assistance. Work is currently being done to put structures in place to address these issues.

Three signature programs were established this year – New Vol Experience, Let’s Talk Vol to Vol, and Vol’s Success Team. The New Vol Experience is a program to enhance the onboarding of students. It extends the onboarding programming over the entire first year. Some of the program features are virtual advising, online pre-orientation, and an extended welcome week. Feedback from the students has been very positive.

Mr. Smith asked how the about the number of students participating in the online pre-orientation. Dr. Williams indicated 5,009 out of approximately 5,400 participated.

Let’s Talk Vol to Vol was an event held during orientation. The program focused on diversity and inclusion and provided students an opportunity to engage in conversations in small groups. We plan to enhance the program and offer it again next year.

In order to serve our students better in their first year, we established Vol’s Success Teams for each incoming student this fall. The team consists of an academic advisor, a one stop counselor, and an academic coach. Based on feedback obtained from our students we, we developed Vol’s Success Team. Every first-year student was assigned an academic advisor, a one stop counselor

and an academic coach – plan and set goals. Seventy-five percent of our first year students have engaged with the success team in some way. Students report lower stress, increased sense of belonging, increased academic success perception. Plan to add a peer mentor next year.

The Vol First Year Experience gives students an opportunity to participate in a high impact practice. The program allows us to create smaller communities for first year students. Eighty-eight percent of our first-year students participated in a course. In previous years only 41% of our students participated. All of the participants took a Gallup Strengths Assessment.

A winter engagement plan will be conducted from December 1<sup>st</sup> and January 20<sup>th</sup> to keep students and families connected to the university. The plan includes phone calls, letters, emails, and six weeks of welcome when they return. The goal is to create a welcoming and engaging environment inside and outside of the classroom. The six weeks of welcome programming will continue in the fall. We are partnering with the Alumni Board to retool the UT Lead program for first generation students. The partnership will allow us to invest more resources and expand the services offered through this program. The UT Brothers of the Academy will launch this fall. We hope to have 200 men of color participate in the program. The four-year curriculum will help them understand and build on their strengths.

Mr. Smith asked for additional information on retention rates. Dr. Williams reported the attrition rate for first time freshmen between fall and spring is 5%. The retention rate from spring to fall this past year was 89%. She cautioned the number may be higher than normal due to policy changes that were made this year. Dr. Williams will provide the group with a chart that demonstrates the changes in retention rates over the last years. Mr. Smith commented on the dramatic improvement of the processes and programs that are in place to proactively engaged with all of our students.

We have the highest number of first-generation students in the SEC. While there is still room for improvement, the retention and graduation rates for our first-generation students is higher than the national average. Our faculty and staff are very open to supporting these students and finding ways to improve their experience.

Mr. Smith commented on the impressive work being done and encouraged Dr. Williams to increasing the marketing efforts about the strides being made in student success.

Mr. Lyons complimented Dr. Williams on the work she is doing and inquired about the population of transfer students and the services they receive. Dr. Williams reported transfer students are assigned vol success teams. The transfer orientation is being revamped to better meet the needs of transfer students. Additional resources have been put into the Vol Bridge program with Pellissippi State Community College in order to make the transition more seamless for those students.

Ms. Poe asked what the difference is between an academic advisor and an academic coach. Dr. Williams explained the academic advisor is the person responsible for making sure the student is

progressing academically. The academic coach serves as a supplement to the advisor. The coach looks at the student holistically and assists them with staying on track to be successful during their time at UT.

## **IX. ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

### **Kari Alldredge, Vice Provost, Enrollment Management**

Ms. Alldredge opened her presentation by expressing her thankfulness of the support of the University's leadership and her partnership with Dr. Williams in the work to retain our students.

Ms. Alldredge provided an overview of the strategic enrollment plan. While other universities saw declines in enrollment, our year three outcomes saw improvements. We welcomed 24,254 (+4%) students this fall, which had not been done in over 20 years. We had a record first time freshmen class of 5,512 (+5%) and added nearly 1,479 (+7%) transfer students.

The three pandemics impacting enrollment are COVID 19, racial injustice, and economic. The impact of these issues has resulted in the inability to recruit students in person, more families are facing financial challenges, and there is a disproportionate impact on students of color and underrepresented communities.

Ms. Alldredge shared ways recruitment and outreach have been altered in an attempt to reach prospective students. Virtual events to explore the campus have been created. Campus tours were re-worked to provide a safe option for students and families to visit campus. The test-optional program, which included a scholarship program for merit aid, was implemented. Admission announcements were changed from rolling admission announcements to two announcement dates.

We are committed to access for all students. The Tri-Star scholarship program consists of the Flagship, UT Promise, and Pledge programs. Eight new schools were added to the Flagship program bring in the total to 38. UT Promise was launched this fall for families with household incomes below \$50,000. The Pledge program provides families with household income of below \$40,000 covers tuition, fees, and room and board.

Ms. Vaughn asked how the new schools were selected and will additional schools be added. Ms. Alldredge shared the Flagship program was created as part of the Geier decree to assure students of color had access to a college education. The schools were selected based on the number of free and reduced lunch recipients, low college attendance rates, and typically have a higher racially diverse community.

Mr. Smith asked for the retention rates for the students included in the Tri-Star programs. Ms. Alldredge will send information on the retention rates for these programs following the meeting. With the addition of several new initiatives, she anticipates the retention rates to increase.

Ms. Poe asked who admission decisions are made without the use of test scores. Ms. Alldredge reported they implemented a holistic review process. All staff members received training on the new rubric. An essay focused on leadership was added. The rubric includes rigor, high school GPA, volunteerism and service, and if they have overcome challenges.

Ms. Vaughn asked how they address the GPA scale now that it can be above a 4.0 and how that impacts the students that are not exposed to advanced courses. Ms. Alldredge discussed the ways weighted GPAs are addressed and acknowledged the varying access to advanced placement and dual enrollment programs. One tool they use is the Bridge program that allows students to obtain additional support prior to beginning classes in the fall to better prepare them.

Mr. Tickle asked if there was a Flagship school in upper East Tennessee. Ms. Alldredge stated they have not identified one in that area. They do heavily recruit in that area. Mr. Tickle and Mr. Smith encouraged Ms. Alldredge to relook at the upper East Tennessee area schools and expressed the need to have all areas of the state represented in the Flagship program. Ms. Alldredge provided a list of the schools to the group.

The Financial Wellness Center is now open. We work with students prior to arriving on campus and while they are on campus to better prepare them on how to handle their finances. We are fortunate to have an \$83 million aid budget. Fifty percent of our students graduate with no debt and the portion of students with debt have \$27,000 or less, which is below the national average.

Our outlook for fall 2021 enrollment is positive. Our applications are currently up 11.4% over last year. The increase is being driven by a 26.2% increase in out of state applications. We expect our in-state applications to increase the closer we get to our deadline of December 15<sup>th</sup>. In preparing for spring 2021, our spring class registrations are up 7.6%. The number of graduates this fall is up 6.6%.

Chancellor Plowman commented on the sophistication of the work being done by Ms. Alldredge and Dr. Williams.

Chancellor Plowman shared the details of the arrangements made to conduct a safe commencement for all of our graduates including a special ceremony for a just married couple.

## **X. STRATEGIC CONVERSATION**

### **Dr. Donde Plowman, Chancellor**

Deferred to another meeting.

## **XI. OTHER BUSINESS**

Chancellor Plowman plans to have the new strategic plan to share with the group at the next meeting.



Chancellor Plowman shared Mr. Allen Carter has been recommended to replace Tim Williams. Mr. Carter's appointment will need legislative approval in 2021.

Syreeta asked for a list of the members terms be shared with the group. Susan England will send the list out to the group.

## **XII. ADJOURN**

With no further business to come before the advisory board, the chair adjourned the meeting at 2:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Susan E. England*

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Susan E. England, Secretary