

**MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, STUDENT LIFE, AND ATHLETICS COMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

The Academic Affairs, Student Life, and Athletics Committee met on Tuesday, March 15, 2022, in the Miller Education Center Meeting Room at Middle Tennessee State University.

**Call to Order**

Committee Chair Pam Wright called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. and congratulated President and Mrs. McPhee for receiving the Murfreesboro NAACP special president's award for ongoing support of underserved populations in the Murfreesboro City Schools.

**Roll Call**

Board Secretary James Floyd called the roll. The following Committee members were in attendance: J.B. Baker, Pete DeLay, Darrell Freeman, Joey Jacobs, Steve Smith, Pam Wright, Chris Karbowski, Rick Cottle, Gabriela Jaimes, Keith Huber, and Chris Massaro. A quorum was declared. Trustee Tom Boyd arrived after the action items on the agenda had been addressed.

President Sidney A. McPhee; Mark Byrnes, University Provost; Joe Bales, Vice President for University Advancement; Andrew Oppmann, Vice President for Marketing and Communications; Yvette Clark, Interim Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer; Deb Sells, Vice President for Student Affairs and Vice Provost for Enrollment and Academic Services; Alan Thomas, Vice President for Business and Finance; Brenda Burkhart, Chief Audit Executive; James Floyd, University Counsel and Board Secretary; and, Kim Edgar, Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff, were also in attendance.

**Approval of Minutes - Action**

The first agenda item was approval of the minutes from the November 9, 2021, Academic Affairs, Student Life, and Athletics Committee meeting. Trustee Delay moved to approve the minutes

from the November 9, 2021, meeting, and Trustee Baker seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken and the motion to approve the minutes from the November 9, 2021, meeting of the Academic Affairs, Student Life, and Athletics Committee passed unanimously.

### **Approval of New Academic Degree Programs - Action**

Provost Byrnes presented two new academic programs and reminded the Trustees that program creation is a lengthy process with constant review over a year and a half.

#### Bachelor of Science in Public Writing and Rhetoric

Provost Byrnes reported that the job data and letters of support demonstrate a demand for writing positions of all sorts. Our writing minor has 100 students. No new faculty are required for this program, and we are confident it will be successful.

Chairman Smith moved to approve the Bachelor of Science in Public Writing and Rhetoric. Vice Chair Karbowski seconded the motion.

Chairman Smith and Trustee Wright were impressed with the materials, especially the letters of support. Trustee Freeman asked how this program would impact enrollment. Provost Byrnes said enrollment is projected as part of the program proposal, and we have met those projections for new programs over the last five years. Trustee Cottle added that there is interest in high schools for writing programs, and we can use this degree as a recruiting tool.

A voice vote was taken and the motion to approve the Bachelor of Science in Public Writing and Rhetoric passed unanimously.

#### Master of Science in Supply Chain Management

Provost Byrnes noted that we recently created a Bachelor of Science in Supply Chain Management by elevating the concentration, and this request is the same at the master's level. We are optimistic about the student demand as well as the employment potential.

Trustee Delay moved to approve the Master of Science in Supply Chain Management. Trustee Cottle seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken and the motion to approve the Master of Science in Supply Chain Management passed unanimously.

#### **Approval of Honorary Degrees - Action**

Provost Byrnes noted that the University has not offered many honorary degrees in its history. Nominations for the former Governor of Tennessee and the current Prime Minister of the Bahamas were reviewed and recommended by a committee of faculty, staff, and administrators to the provost and president, who also recommend.

Trustee Karbowski moved to approve honorary degrees for Bill Haslam and Philip Edward Davis. Trustee Baker seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken, and the motion to approve honorary degrees for Bill Haslam and Philip Edward Davis passed unanimously.

#### **Annual Report of Academic Program Actions - Information**

Provost Byrnes presented a summary of all program level curriculum changes during 2021.

#### **Fraternity and Sorority Life Update - Information**

Vice President Deb Sells introduced Leslie Merritt, Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life, who gave an update of Fraternity and Sorority Life at MTSU including national trends, membership, and GPA data. MTSU has 24 chapters on MTSU campus, 10 sororities and 14 fraternities.

Trustee Freeman noted that student engagement in organizations like fraternities or sororities improves their chance of graduating. He asked about the gap in graduation rates for those not in the organizations and how to go forward with engaging students to feel welcome at MTSU.

Vice President Sells joined the conversation and gave an overview of the Center for Student Involvement and Leadership, the Connection Point program, and ways for students to build affinity to the university to carry them through tough times. President McPhee asked Dr. Sells to describe the button program. As part of Connection Point, there is a button for each activity

which drives students to events and activities. Dr. McPhee added that the colleges have academic activities, and he hosts a semesterly pizza dinner for students. We are always looking for more ways to include and engage our students.

Trustee Jaimes inquired about the decline in the men's GPA and how that relates to an increase in high-risk behavior. Ms. Merritt said the men's groups learned that they had to make some adjustments in coming back to campus to in-person classes and activities. Each chapter sets their own scholarship goals, and she expects an improvement this semester. Regarding high-risk behavior, Ms. Merritt added that we are fortunate to have strong leaders in the FSL community who are willing to stand up and report violations.

Trustee Freeman asked about the correlation between overall enrollment and FSL membership. Dr. Sells stated that the percentage of undergraduate students who become members of fraternity and sorority life has stayed remarkably stable over the years.

#### **Athletics Build Blue Project Update - Information Item**

Athletics Director Massaro introduced new staff in the department and acknowledged the efforts of Andy Womack and Drew Shea in fundraising. Mr. Womack reported on the ongoing Build Blue capital campaign and the associated projects. Vice President Alan Thomas reported that we will be disclosing two additional projects in our planning and introduced Bill Waits, Assistant Vice President for Campus Planning. Mr. Waits described the capital disclosure process.

Trustee Freeman asked about the facility construction decision making process and its connection to enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. President McPhee responded that the majority of the budget goes to the academic division. With regards to facilities, our recent and proposed building construction reflects the demand for our graduates in those academic areas. MTSU produces 5,000 graduates per year for the local economy.

Chairman Smith added that we should look to the state legislature for answers about funding buildings and the purge. Purging students for non-payment is a statutory requirement. President McPhee referenced documents showing the University's efforts towards a 50% reduction in the number of students purged and private funds raised to help students from being purged.

Trustee Boyd noted that improving athletics facilities attracts students. He supports the Build Blue campaign as an effort to present an attractive "front door" to the University so that we can catch up with our peers and enhance our appeal to prospective students in all disciplines.

Trustee Cottle added from the academic side that the Campus Planning office thinks about the changing needs every day and is projecting future long-term needs.

#### **Faculty Senate Academic Presentation - Information Item**

Bob Gordon, associate professor of media arts and Faculty Senate President, read a statement from the Faculty Senate to affirm Policy 201 Academic Freedom and Responsibility and referred to the Chicago Statement previously approved by this Committee. Dr. Lando Carter, chair of the Faculty Senate subcommittee on academics, stated that while there are boundaries to academic freedom, House Bill 2670 looks likely to pass, and the faculty have concerns about how this would affect recruiting and retaining talented faculty. Mr. Gordon added that the faculty at MTSU both appreciate and need the Board's support as we prepare students for not only productive careers but also to become informed, discerning, and involved citizens.

Trustee Cottle made a motion to change this item from information to an action item so that the Committee could vote to reaffirm Policy 201. Trustee Delay seconded the motion. President McPhee added that Policy 201 is in place. He noted that the Board has indicated that it supports the policy, and there was no need for further action. A voice vote was taken and the motion to move this item from information to action did not pass.

Trustee Wright affirmed that the Board supports academic freedom, and the Board would want to know if the policy was not being honored. Trustee Cottle then added that the policy stands for

itself, and issues will be handled internally before becoming a Board matter. In addition, Trustee Karbowiak expressed her full support and asked that issues be brought to the Board immediately. Finally, Chairman Smith added that the Board of Trustees discussed and accepted the Chicago principles previously.

**Adjournment**

Committee Chair Wright adjourned the meeting at 10:32 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Academic Affairs, Student Life, and Athletics Committee