

**Staff Advisory Committee to the President**  
**November 21, 2013, 1:30 p.m.**

**Members Present:** Joy Cook, Brooke Dedmond, Susan Henry, Patrena Hicks, Kaye Loftis (chair), Donna Russell, Randa Thompson, Denette Way

**Others Present:** Evelyn Chambers, President Oldham and Terri Taylor

**President's Comments**

President Oldham opened the meeting stating it has been a busy semester thus far. Campaigning for the reprieve on the closure of the ROTC program was a major undertaking for the University. Upcoming events include hosting the Legislative Forum with area legislators, TBR Regents as well as the TBR Chancellor and others. This event provides the University an opportunity to highlight on-going campus priorities. This year, three priorities will be the focus:

- **Business Incubator Facility**—TTU will seek \$2.15 million in state matching funds for the construction of a \$4.3 million facility that, when completed, will support startup businesses generated by our research centers in the areas of engineering, logistics, manufacturing and medical informatics. This facility will be an invaluable resource in TTU's ongoing initiative to develop entrepreneurial and innovative companies that will merge industry, students and faculty. The incubator space will be leased to regional entrepreneurs, industry/student teams, faculty/student teams, and regional industry starting new enterprises. Constructing this asset is a result of our research and multiple meetings with local leaders to identify and capitalize on the region's competitive strengths. We intend to use it to complement the Upper Cumberland region's economic push to keep TTU graduates in Tennessee through the creation of higher skill and higher wage jobs and by educating highly qualified employees within the region – significantly increasing the technological proficiency of the region's workforce.
- **TTU Science Complex**—TTU endorses the state initiative to create bond funding for capital construction, and urges strong legislative support. TTU also supports the concept of a matching program and pledges to work to secure a percentage match for the first building in the new science complex this year. Science and engineering programs support the core mission of the university and are vitally important to state economic development initiatives. Foster Hall, one of the university's oldest buildings, is seriously deficient as a modern science building. These facilities are home to one of the state's largest undergraduate chemistry programs – as well as providing laboratory support for undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs in engineering, nursing and environmental science – and provide general education classrooms for many freshmen and other students on campus.

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- **Engineering Initiative**—TTU's College of Engineering requests \$2 million of recurring annual funds for five years in order to transform our programs by 2020. TTU will also invest \$1 million of permanent recurring funds while also seeking additional funding from industry and private donors to sustain these programs after the state funds end. TTU's ability to produce STEM-ready graduates to the state's workforce will be significantly enhanced by increasing the quality and quantity of engineering and computer science graduates. Over the next five years these funds will assist the College of Engineering in its goal to increase the annual number of Bachelor of Science graduates by 25 percent (90 graduates), and Master of Science and Doctor of Philosophy graduates by 50 percent (25 graduates).

The upcoming TSSAA Blue Cross Bowl Championship games provides the campus an opportunity to show case the university's improvements for a good first impression as it hosts 50,000-60,000 guests to campus. This event is a definite boost for the region and Cookeville. Announcements regarding adjustments in parking are forthcoming. As always, visitors should be welcomed to our campus and to Cookeville.

The 2013 Outstanding Staff Awards were recently presented to four individuals: Susan Henry, Virginia Lewis, Rickey Flatt and Ron Romzek. Each received a \$500 monetary award and plaque. For 2014, the monetary award will be increased to \$1,000.

Students just completed voting earlier this week to approve a \$100 fee per semester to build a new fitness center. The votes cast totaled 3,300 with fifty-two percent of voting students in favor of the building fee. The vote was the product of a bill passed unanimously by the SGA that called for a referendum about the building. The proposed building is designed to accommodate an anticipated growth of at least 15,000 students in the next five years. It will also have specialized spaces for veterans returning to school, people with disabilities, senior citizens and other users with specialized needs. Pending TBR approval, the new center could be built either at the corner of Willow Avenue and Seventh Street, or the corner of University Drive and Willow Avenue. Plans are for Athletics to buy equity out of current center and assume the center when vacated. Members questioned the possibility of employees receiving free membership for fitness center use as an incentive with the wellness programs promoted by the Partners in Health insurance coverage. President Oldham stated this has not been considered and if this were to be taken into consideration, there would have to be an off-setting benefit reduction such as no pay increases, etc. to compensate.

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### Suggestion Box

**Suggestion**—A suggestion was received concerning TTU’s HR policy as it relates to clerical and support staff and the tuition reimbursement program which states that courses must be taken at a Tennessee public institution. The tuition reimbursement program for faculty, administrators, and professional staff states that those employees may take courses at any public or private accredited institution, and that tuition is reimbursed at the Tennessee public institution rate.

The suggestion received from a support associate stated they respectfully disagreed with the policy and that clerical/support staff should have the same opportunity that a faculty or administrative member would receive. Also, the TBR policy states that clerical and support staff may take courses outside of Tennessee, at a public or private institution, with reimbursement fulfilled up to the Tennessee public institution rate.

**Response**—TTU just recently revised the policy “Educational Assistance for Tennessee Tech Employees” to mirror/adopt TBR Guideline P-130 as may be amended from time to time. The effective date for implementation is January 1, 2014. This revision was approved at the November 13, 2013, meeting of the Administrative Council. Following is the link to the guideline: <https://policies.tbr.edu/guidelines/educational-assistance-tbr-system-employees>.

There being no further business of the committee, Chairman Loftis adjourned the meeting at 1:55 p.m.

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Terri Taylor, Recorder