

TENNESSEE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

Minutes of the Fall Quarterly Commission Meeting

University of Memphis Lambuth Campus

Wilder Student Union, Jack Morris Ballroom

705 Lambuth Blvd.

Jackson, TN 38301

November 7, 2024

[Link to recording](#)

Chairwoman Scarlett called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. CST.

| Member | PRESENT | ABSENT |
|---|---------|--------|
| Chairwoman Tara Scarlett | X | |
| Commissioner Whitney Allmon | X | |
| Commissioner Skylar Brackett | X | |
| Commissioner Jimmy Matlock | X | |
| Commissioner Will Perry | X | |
| Commissioner John Rader | X | |
| Commissioner Mike Ragsdale | X | |
| Commissioner Robert Smith | X | |
| Commissioner Vernon Stafford, Jr. | X | |
| Commissioner Charles Wood | X | |
| Secretary Tre Hargett | X | |
| Treasurer David H. Lillard, Jr. | X | |
| Nathan James, Designee for Commissioner Sara Morrison | X | |
| Comptroller Jason Mumpower | X | |

At the start of the meeting there were 12 voting members physically present and one member electronically present, constituting a quorum.

Adoption of Agenda

Chairwoman Scarlett asked the Commission to consider amending the agenda to allow for the appointment of Commissioner Brackett to a committee.

Commissioner Stafford made a motion to adopt the agenda as amended. Commissioner Wood seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Approval of Minutes: August 15, 2024, Summer Quarterly Meeting

Commissioner Allmon made a motion to approve the August 15, 2024, Summer Quarterly Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Ragsdale seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed with 12 ayes and one abstention from Commissioner Smith.

Chair's Report

Chairwoman Scarlett delivered the Chair's Report, noting that the recent challenges posed by floods in East Tennessee have highlighted the resilience and solidarity across the state. Chairwoman Scarlett emphasized that two-thirds of current job opportunities require a postsecondary degree, yet only 25% of high school graduates achieve this level of education. There is a critical need to address workforce demands, improve student access, enhance enrollment, and support student success.

Institution Report

Dr. Bill Hardgrave, President for the University of Memphis, provided the institution report, highlighting the University's outcomes-focused roadmap. Dr. Hardgrave noted that, to improve student success and ensure better outcomes, the University has raised admissions requirements for incoming freshmen to better align preparation levels with academic expectations.

Commission members asked questions, and a discussion was held.

Executive Director's Report

Dr. Steven Gentile, Executive Director, acknowledged the college and university presidents in attendance, thanked the University of Memphis for hosting the meeting, and reminded participants of the scheduled tour of Jackson State Community College following the meeting. Dr. Gentile then outlined three primary focus areas for his presentation: financial aid, college access initiatives, and enrollment updates.

On the topic of financial aid, Dr. Gentile introduced three main themes. The first is consolidating three existing financial aid programs into a single award for all Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) students to streamline support. The second focuses on improving student persistence by adjusting HOPE GPA benchmarks to maintain eligibility, providing a stipend for Promise students, allowing enrollment status changes without appeal, and lowering the Reconnect age from 23 to 21. The third theme addresses strategies to mitigate brain drain for low-income high-achieving students, including raising the adjusted gross income limit for Aspire awards, awarding the General Assembly Merit Scholarship (GAMs) and Aspire awards together for eligible students, and increasing the GAMs award. Additional support for veterans was also highlighted. The estimated cost for these initiatives is \$102.3 million. Commission members asked questions, and a discussion was held.

On the topic of college access, Dr. Gentile introduced Mr. Duane Gregg, Senior Director for College Access Initiatives, who provided an overview of the \$35 million GEAR UP TN grant awarded by the United States Department of Education, to be distributed over the course of seven years. This grant aims to achieve several key goals: improving academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education; increasing high school graduation rates and postsecondary enrollment; raising educational expectations and awareness of postsecondary options; and fostering a college-going culture within schools. These

objectives will be pursued through services guided by four domains of college readiness. Commission members asked questions, and a discussion was held.

On the topic of enrollment, Dr. Gentile introduced Ms. Paige Elliott, Senior Director of Research and Strategy, who provided an overview of recent data, including FAFSA filing rates among TN Promise applicants, changes in undergraduate headcount from fall 2023 to fall 2024, and freshmen enrollment trends over the same period. Ms. Elliott also shared a national update indicating a 3% increase in overall undergraduate enrollment compared to last fall, a 5% decrease in freshmen enrollment, and a 2.1% increase in graduate student enrollment. Commission members asked questions, and a discussion was held.

Consent Calendar

Comptroller Mumpower made a motion to approve the consent calendar. Commissioner Stafford seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

Regular Calendar I

I. FY2025-26 Operating State Appropriation Recommendations (*Action Item*)

Treasurer Lillard, Chair of the Finance and Operations Committee, provided an overview of the FY2025-26 Operating State Appropriation Recommendations and proposed its adoption following the positive recommendation from the Finance and Operations Committee.

Treasurer Lillard made a motion to approve the FY2025-26 Operating State Appropriation Recommendations. Commissioner Stafford seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed with 12 ayes and one abstention from Commissioner Smith.

II. FY2025-26 Guiding Tuition and Fees Ranges (*Action Item*)

Treasurer Lillard, Chair of the Finance and Operations Committee, provided an overview of the FY2025-26 Guiding Tuition and Fees Ranges, recommending a range of 0-4%. Treasurer Lillard highlighted that the Finance and Operations Committee had received insights from Dr. Claire Stinson, Vice President for Planning and Finance at Tennessee Technological University, who offered an institutional perspective on the potential impacts of the proposed tuition and fees ranges.

Commission members asked questions, and a discussion was held. Treasurer Lillard made a motion to approve the FY2025-26 Guiding Tuition and Fees Ranges. Commissioner Ragsdale seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed with 12 ayes and one abstention from Commissioner Smith.

III. FY2025-26 Capital Projects Recommendations (*Action Item*)

Treasurer Lillard, Chair of the Finance and Operations Committee, provided an overview of the Capital Projects Recommendations, which included \$1,303,406,303 for capital outlay projects, \$334,900,000 for capital maintenance projects, and \$338,900,000 for disclosed projects.

Treasurer Lillard made a motion to approve the Capital Projects Recommendations. Comptroller Mumpower seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed with 12 ayes and one abstention from Commissioner Smith.

IV. East Tennessee State University Master Plan (*Action Item*)

Treasurer Lillard, Chair of the Finance and Operations Committee, provided an overview of the East Tennessee State University Master Plan and the positive recommendation from the Finance and Operations Committee. Treasurer Lillard then introduced Mr. Jeremy Ross, Chief Operating Officer and Vice President for Administration at East Tennessee State University. Mr. Ross summarized key elements of the plan, including initiatives to enhance campus belonging; address housing shortages for undergraduate, graduate, and non-traditional students; accommodate projected growth in graduate enrollment; and resolve space deficiencies, including parking and campus mobility challenges.

Commission members asked questions, and a discussion was held. Treasurer Lillard made a motion to approve the East Tennessee State University Master Plan. Secretary Hargett seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

V. University of Tennessee- Institute of Agriculture Master Plan (*Action Item*)

Treasurer Lillard, Chair of the Finance and Operations Committee, provided an overview of the University of Tennessee – Institute of Agriculture Master Plan and the positive recommendation from the Finance and Operations Committee. Treasurer Lillard introduced Dr. Carver, Senior Vice President and Senior Vice Chancellor of the UT Institute of Agriculture. Dr. Carver summarized key elements of the plan. These include the growth of research and STEM programs, increasing demands for staff and visitor housing, the development of outreach experiences, and the need to update outdated facilities to enhance impact and support modern standards.

Commission members asked questions, and a discussion was held. Treasurer Lillard made a motion to approve the University of Tennessee – Institute of Agriculture Master Plan. Comptroller Mumpower seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

VI. Postsecondary State Authorization Rule Revision (*Action Item*)

Dr. Stephanie Bellard-Chase, Senior Director of Postsecondary State Authorization, provided an overview of the rule revision which includes a proposed increase in fees.

Commissioner Ragsdale made a motion to approve the Postsecondary State Authorization Rule Revision. Comptroller Mumpower seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed with 12 ayes and one nay by Commissioner Rader.

VII. New Academic Programs (*Action Item*)

A. University of Tennessee, Health Science Center – Occupational Therapy Doctorate (OTD)

Commissioner Allmon, Chair of the Access, Academics, and Student Success Committee, provided an overview of the University of Tennessee, Health Science Center’s Occupational Therapy Doctorate program and the Committee’s recommendation for its approval.

Commissioner Allmon made a motion to approve the University of Tennessee, Health Science Center - Occupational Therapy Doctorate. Secretary Hargett seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

B. University of Tennessee, Knoxville – Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication (PhD)

Commissioner Allmon, Chair of the Access, Academics, and Student Success Committee, provided an overview of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville's Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication PhD program and the Committee's recommendation for its approval.

Commissioner Allmon made a motion to approve the University of Tennessee, Knoxville's Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication PhD. Chairwoman Scarlett seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

VIII. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Success Advisory Board Appointments and Bylaws Update (*Action Item*)

Commissioner Allmon, Chair of the Access, Academics, and Student Success Committee, provided an overview of the HBCU Success Advisory Board Appointments and Bylaws. Commissioner Allmon highlighted that the board will consist of four appointed members, with college and university presidents serving as voting members and having the ability to designate a representative as needed. The Committee recommended the approval of the appointments and bylaws.

Commissioner Allmon made a motion to approve the HBCU Success Advisory Board Appointments and Bylaws. Commissioner Perry seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

IX. Policy Revision, Rules of Procedure (*Action Item*)

Mr. Scott Sloan, General Counsel and Chief Operating Officer, provided an overview of the proposed policy revision, which includes the introduction of two-year terms for officers, a one term limit for serving in the same position, the removal of the grand division requirement for officers, and a rotation system for the election of the Chair between legislative and gubernatorial appointments, with the Chair also being selected from the Vice Chair position. Additionally, the revision removes the requirement for the election of offices to take place at the summer quarterly meeting.

Comptroller Mumpower made a motion to approve the Policy Revision, Rules of Procedure. Commissioner Stafford seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

X. Election of Officers (*Action Item*)

Chairwoman Scarlett stated that this was the first opportunity to elect officers under the new Rules, which provide for a two-year term. The offices consist of a chair, two vice-chairs, and a secretary. In order to accommodate the new requirements that the chairs will be selected from the vice-chairs and the chair must alternate between gubernatorial and legislative appointees, members may wish to select vice-chairs who are from the opposite appointment group as the chair that is selected.

Chairwoman Scarlett handed the gavel to Comptroller Mumpower to oversee the Election of Officers agenda item. Comptroller Mumpower made a motion to appoint Commissioner Scarlett as Chair, Secretary Hargett as Vice Chair, Commissioner Ragsdale as Vice Chair, and Commissioner Allmon as Secretary. Commissioner Wood seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

Comptroller Mumpower handed the gavel to Chairwoman Scarlett to continue the remainder of the meeting.

XI. Committee Appointment (*Action Item*)

Chairwoman Scarlett nominated Commissioner Brackett to serve on the Finance and Operations Committee. Commissioner Ragsdale seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

XII. TigerLIFE and Step-Up Presentation (*Information Only*)

Mr. Patrick J. Krolik, Project FIRST Grant Program Manager, presented information on the TigerLife and Step-Up programs, which focus on providing inclusive higher education opportunities for those with intellectual disabilities. The program supports participants in earning certificates and developing career skills that facilitate their transition to paid employment upon graduation.

Commission members asked questions, and a discussion was held.

XIII. Other Business

Comptroller Mumpower opened the floor for college and university presidents to share institutional highlights with the Commission.

Mr. Randy Boyd, President of the UT System, expressed appreciation to Dr. Gentile for the financial aid presentation and the focus on student access and success through financial aid support. Mr. Boyd emphasized the need to reconsider the Commission's approach to capital projects and encouraged staff to explore potential outcomes-based formulas for determining which projects should be recommended.

Dr. Michael Licari, President of Austin Peay State University, discussed student access and the strain on infrastructure as enrollment has increased over 16% in the last year.

Dr. Flora Tydings, Chancellor of the Tennessee Board of Regents, provided an overview of the Tennessee Board of Regents and current projects at the TCATs, as well as expected enrollment growth.

Chairwoman Scarlett requested that staff review the capital process and consider whether an outcomes-based formula would be beneficial for future recommendations.

Dr. Gentile reminded attendees about the Jackson State Community College tour scheduled after the meeting and informed them of an upcoming budget hearing with the Governor on Tuesday.

Chairwoman Scarlett adjourned the meeting at 11:57 a.m.

NEXT THEC COMMISSION MEETING:

Friday, February 7, 2025, in Nashville, TN.

THEC Chairwoman Tara Scarlett

THEC Secretary Whitney Allmon