



# THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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## MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION, RESEARCH, AND SERVICE COMMITTEE September 8, 2023

A Special Meeting of the Education, Research, and Service Committee of The University of Tennessee Board of Trustees was held at 9:00 a.m. (EDT) on Friday, September 8, 2023. The meeting was held virtually with all Committee members participating electronically or by telephone. The meeting was hosted from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville campus.

Committee Members Present: Jamie R. Woodson, Committee Chair; John C. Compton, Board Chair; Charles Hatcher, Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Agriculture; Shanea A. McKinney; Donald J. Smith; and Sean Walker (Faculty Representative).

Other in Attendance:

*Trustees:* Bradford D. Box, Decosta Jenkins, Christopher L. Patterson; William (Bill) C. Rhodes III; David N. Watson, and T. Lang Wiseman.

*University Administration:* President Randy Boyd; Bernard Savarese, Acting Vice President for Academic Affairs, Research, and Student Success; Cynthia Moore, Board Secretary and Special Counsel; Chancellor Steve Angle (UT Chattanooga); Chancellor Peter Buckley (UT Health Science Center); Chancellor Yancy Freeman (UT Martin); Interim Chancellor Linda Martin (UT Southern); and Chancellor Donde Plowman (UT Knoxville). In addition, other members of the UT senior leadership and administrative staff were present.

Ms. Moore addressed requirements for meetings conducted with members participating electronically and announced the presence of a quorum. The meeting was webcast for the convenience of the University community, the general public, and the media.

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### **Opening Remarks of the Committee Chair**

Committee Chair Jamie Woodson opened the meeting by announcing that the Board of Trustees were invited to attend and participate in today's meeting of the ERS Committee. She encouraged all Trustees to freely share their thoughts during the meeting, particularly regarding the proposed change to the admissions policy for all campuses.

### **Admissions Policy Proposal (All Campuses)**

UT System President Randy Boyd began his remarks by discussing affordability, which is a vital part of access to higher education. President Boyd stated that while many states have seen a continuing, long-term decline in public funding for public institutions of higher education, such is not the case in the State of Tennessee. Further, as discussed at the Annual Meeting of the Board, over the last five years, on average, the University has had nominal increases in tuition (approximately 1% per year).

President Boyd stated that the University is committed to continuing to offer its students and their families a world class education at an affordable price. An important part of that effort is the recent decision to increase the adjusted gross family income for students eligible for the UT Promise from \$60,000 household income to \$75,000, along with increasing the minimum award from \$100 per semester to \$500 semester (these awards are generally used to cover other expenses, such as textbooks). He explained that these changes will mean that nearly 67% of college-going Tennesseans may attend a UT campus free of tuition and fees, subject to meeting admissions and other eligibility requirements.

President Boyd explained that the UT administration is requesting that the undergraduate admission policies applicable for each of the University's campuses be amended to offer guaranteed admission<sup>1</sup> to all Tennessee high school students who meet any of the following criteria:

- 1) Finish in the top 10%<sup>2</sup> of their high school's graduating class; or
- 2) Achieve a 4.0<sup>3</sup> or higher GPA; or
- 3) Achieve a 3.2<sup>3</sup> or higher GPA and have an ACT composite score of 23<sup>4</sup> or higher (or an SAT score of 1130-1150 or higher).

President Boyd explained that this change would further the University's land grant mission by allowing it to expand access, recruit more of Tennessee's best and brightest students to its campuses and promote greater geographic and socio-economic representation. If approved, UT would join public institutions in at least a dozen other states, which offer guaranteed admissions to qualified students. University admissions officials project that this change would have a positive effect on the number of Tennesseans choosing to apply to and enroll at one of its campuses.

President Boyd advised that pending approval by the Board, the admissions policy change would apply to all campuses offering undergraduate admissions and go into effect immediately for the Fall 2024 admissions cycle. Further, results of this unique initiative will be reviewed annually with the Board of Trustees to determine if adjustments should be made in future years based on outcomes and effectiveness tied to the University's mission and goals. President Boyd stressed that this is a change to the criteria for automatic early admission. Each UT campus will continue to consider other applications holistically and admit students that may not meet these requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> Students must meet campus application deadlines for guaranteed admission. Guaranteed admission means an offer of undergraduate admission to the University of Tennessee campus to which the applicant has applied (subject to satisfaction of the applicable eligibility requirements). Such an offer does not guarantee acceptance into a particular college, school, department, major, or program.

<sup>2</sup> Class rank and GPA will be determined based on an applicant's 6th semester transcript (i.e., following the completion of their junior year).

<sup>3</sup> UT Knoxville calculates and utilizes a weighted Core GPA based on a student's grades in 16 Core academic subjects. Other campuses may choose to use a student's cumulative high school GPA.

<sup>4</sup> UT Knoxville will require a minimum ACT subscore of 19 in Math and English.

Committee Chair Woodson recognized Board Chair John Compton, who observed that the proposal represents an example of cross-campus collaboration that is at the heart of the Be One UT initiative. He noted that the higher education community has known for several years that the nation was approaching a demographic cliff that would see a dramatic decline in the population of college-going students, which was further compounded by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite those factors, the UT campuses have been able to retain and grow the number of students enrolled at their institutions, particularly at UT Knoxville, which has experienced dramatic growth in its student population.

Board Chair Compton asked the Chancellors attending the meeting for their views about potential inadvertent consequences and how the proposed policy change would impact their campuses. Chancellor Steve Angle (UT Chattanooga); Chancellor Yancy Freeman (UT Martin); and Interim Chancellor Linda Martin (UT Southern) expressed their support for the change in the Admissions Policy. Chancellor Donde Plowman (UT Knoxville) also supported the change; however, she expressed concern regarding guaranteeing early admission to students who achieved a 3.2 or higher GPA and had an ACT composite score of 23 or higher (or an SAT score of 1130-1150 or higher). Chancellor Plowman noted that UT Knoxville currently is facing a strain on its ability to offer on-campus student housing to its growing student population, which it hopes to address when it opens new housing (scheduled to come online in the Fall of 2025). She further indicated that there are several new variables, including the change in eligibility requirements for UT Promise. While there is some ability to estimate how many Tennessee students may meet the first two requirements, there is currently insufficient data to fully understand the potential pool of applicants to UT Knoxville if the third criteria is applied. Chancellor Plowman also confirmed that UT Knoxville also has several pathways for prospective students, including those attending other UT campuses, to transfer to the Knoxville campus later in their academic careers.

The Committee members and other trustees engaged in a lengthy and in-depth discussion of the Admissions Policy Proposal, the impact it would have on enrollment at all University campuses, and the potential students who would benefit from the change. There was strong support for clearly identifying benchmarks, based on merit, for Tennessee students so they have a better understanding of the campuses admissions processes and what is required to be eligible for early, guaranteed admission at the University. There were concerns expressed in terms of (i) moving too quickly, without sufficient information, if the third criteria is applied to UT Knoxville; (ii) whether the third criteria should be the same for all campuses; and (iii) whether additional component(s) should be considered as part of the third criteria to ensure a pathway for early admission for motivated students from a disadvantaged background. Several of the trustees expressed their support for the consideration of a third eligibility requirement for UT Knoxville. Dr. Walker, Faculty Representative to the Committee, shared his views and those received from other members of the faculty. He was encouraged by the thoughtful consideration that was being given to the proposal. He indicated that he shared the same concerns over unintended consequences and whether it would be appropriate to apply the same criteria to the UT Knoxville campus. Dr. Walker recommended that a yearly review be conducted to assess and learn from the experiences of the other campuses.

Committee Chair Woodson indicated that there will be ongoing conversations in upcoming ERS Committee meetings regarding enrollment strategies for all the campuses over the next year. Chancellor Plowman was asked to continue to evaluate the third criteria and to bring back her recommendations as to whether it should be applied on the same or on a different basis for the UT Knoxville campus in future years.

Following discussion, Committee Chair Woodson indicated that the ERS Committee would first act on the motion to bring the resolution forward, as written and included in the meeting materials, and to consider whether to amend the resolution.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, a roll call vote was taken, the Committee unanimously approved amending the resolution whereby the first two criteria of the proposed admission policy (for early, guaranteed freshman admission for Tennessee students) would be applied to all UT campuses as contemplated, with the third eligibility criteria would be applied for admission to UT Chattanooga, UT Martin, and UT Southern.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, a roll call vote was taken, the Committee unanimously approved the amended resolution pertaining to the Admissions Policy Proposal. A copy of the amended resolution is attached hereto and filed with these minutes.

### **Adjournment**

With no further business to come before the Committee, Committee Chairperson Woodson adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,

/s/ Cynthia C. Moore \_\_\_\_\_

Cynthia C. Moore  
Secretary and Special Counsel

### Attachment

- Amended Resolution

Amended Resolution: Guaranteed Admissions Policy (All Campuses)

Resolved:

The Board of Trustees hereby approves the following:

1. The undergraduate admission policies applicable to each of the University's campuses shall be amended to offer guaranteed first-year admission<sup>1</sup> to all Tennessee high school students who meet any of the following criteria:
  - Finish in the top 10%<sup>2</sup> of their high school's graduating class; or
  - Achieve a 4.0<sup>3</sup> or higher GPA.

Additionally, for UT Chattanooga, UT Martin, and UT Southern, the following additional criteria shall also apply:

- Achieve a 3.2 or higher GPA and have an ACT composite score of 23 or higher (or an SAT score of 1130-1150 or higher).

All applicants, regardless of class rank or GPA, must submit ACT/SAT test scores.

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- <sup>1</sup> *Students must meet campus application deadlines for guaranteed admission. Guaranteed admission means an offer of undergraduate admission to the University of Tennessee campus to which the applicant has applied (subject to satisfaction of the applicable eligibility requirements). Such an offer does not guarantee acceptance into a particular college, school, department, major, or program.*
  - <sup>2</sup> *Class rank and GPA will be determined based on an applicant's 6<sup>th</sup> semester transcript (i.e., following the completion of their junior year).*
  - <sup>3</sup> *UT Knoxville calculates and utilizes a weighted Core GPA based on a student's grades in 16 Core academic subjects. Other campuses may choose to use a student's cumulative high school GPA.*

2. This resolution shall be effective immediately, and the foregoing admission requirements shall be applicable to the Fall 2024 class.
3. The proper officers of the University are authorized to take other actions as may be necessary and deemed appropriate to effectuate the changes to the outstanding admission policies to comply with the provisions of this resolution.
4. The President (or his/her designee) is authorized to issue additional guidance to the campuses from time to time, as may be deemed appropriate and approved by the President, to further clarify the intent and applicability of the admission requirements as set forth herein.