

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AT MARTIN

ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES

The University of Tennessee at Martin Advisory Board convened on January 23, 2026, at the UT Martin campus, in the Boling University Center, Room 206 AB, with Chairman Art Sparks presiding. The meeting commenced at 1:00 PM CST.

I. Roll Call

The meeting opened with a roll call led by Secretary Jake Bynum, who confirmed the presence of the following members: Art Sparks, Chairman; Hal Bynum; Dan Strasser; Stefan Maupin; Jennifer Hampton; Dr. Dan McDonough, Faculty Senate Representative; and Darby Self, Student Representative. With all members present, Chairman Sparks confirmed that a quorum was established, allowing the meeting to proceed.

Chairman Sparks observed with characteristic humor that this would be the first meeting in some time that would not require a roll call vote on each motion and that the board could proceed by voice vote.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Chairman Sparks directed members to Tab 1 of the board packet and invited any corrections, deletions, or additions to the minutes from the previous meeting. Hearing none, he called for a motion. Dan Strasser moved to approve the minutes as presented. Dr. Dan McDonough seconded the motion. Chairman Sparks called for a vote, and the motion carried unanimously.

III. FISCAL YEAR 2025 YEAR-END OVERVIEW

Chairman Sparks introduced Senior Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration Petra McPhearson to present the fiscal year 2025 year-end overview. Senior Vice Chancellor McPhearson opened by noting that fiscal year 2025 had been challenging, but one the institution was glad to have in its rearview mirror. The books had been closed earlier that week, considerably later than the typical August close. The delay was attributable to fiscal year 2025 being the first year-end close conducted in the new Oracle accounting system, which the campus refers to internally as DASH and which was implemented in January 2025. Closing the year required reconciliation across two accounting systems simultaneously, generating significant lessons learned, and the institution is now working fully in the fiscal year 2026 environment.

On the revenue side, Senior Vice Chancellor McPhearson reported a modest shortfall in budgeted tuition and fees, attributable largely to summer school enrollment variability that could not be adjusted within the fiscal year. Variances in state appropriations were primarily attributable to fee-waiver funding. Sales and services revenues exceeded the budget, and auxiliary revenues did as well, although the budget had not been updated to reflect actual auxiliary activity. ENG revenue finished at approximately \$800,000. Overall, revenues produced a \$6.2 million surplus relative to budget.

On the expenditure side, the largest surplus appeared in the Instruction functional area. Senior Vice Chancellor McPhearson attributed this to the DASH transition, noting that uncertainty around real-time budget visibility caused some campus units to spend conservatively. The finance team is increasing the volume of reports made available and providing additional training to help campus users grow comfortable with the system. A shortfall in Student Services was reported and was related primarily to athletics. Auxiliary operations showed an expenditure shortfall offset by stronger-than-expected revenue, consistent with the unit's self-supporting requirement. Adjustments to the way transfers are budgeted continue to be refined.

When the revenue and expenditure sides are netted, the institution finished close to plan: revenues totaled approximately \$141 million and expenses totaled approximately \$141 million, with revenues exceeding expenditures by approximately \$175,000.

Stefan Maupin asked for clarification on the grants and contracts line. Senior Vice Chancellor McPhearson explained that the figure reflected within the education and general budget represents only the indirect cost, or administrative facilities-and-administrative portion, of the institution's grants. The remainder of grant activity is held in restricted funds and is not reflected in the operating budget because of the restricted use of those funds. Chairman Sparks added that this typically represents a percentage taken to support the administration of grants, and that the figure shown understates total grant activity at the university.

Dan Strasser inquired about the leading factors driving variance in tuition and fees. Senior Vice Chancellor McPhearson identified summer school enrollment as the principal contributor, noting that summer enrollment is difficult to project and that the budget was not adjusted in time to reflect actual results.

Chairman Sparks asked about the performance of the new DASH system. Senior Vice Chancellor McPhearson reported that the system's underlying functionality is operational, while reporting capabilities remain a challenge. Oracle has provided a roadmap of fixes targeted between now and June, with additional items in the queue thereafter. Payroll matters experienced some difficulty during the year, and the team continues to refine input processes to prevent recurrence. The fiscal year 2025 year-end overview was received as a report of information; no action was required.

IV. ENROLLMENT AND RETENTION UPDATE

Chairman Sparks introduced Dr. Destin Tucker, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management, to present the spring 2026 enrollment report and early indicators for fall 2026.

Dr. Tucker reported that spring 2026 enrollment had exceeded the institution's goal. The preliminary headcount stood at approximately 7,550 students, reflecting an increase of 7.19 percent over spring 2025 against a goal of 5 percent growth. Dr. Tucker noted that the figure was pulled prior to census day and prior to drops for nonpayment, and the final number, following reconciliation, was expected to settle at approximately 6.2 percent. Returning undergraduate students and dual enrollment students are driving the spring increase, each up approximately 300 students year over year.

Two student categories present opportunities for additional work. Transfer enrollment was down approximately 20 students. New graduate students experienced a dip this spring, although Dr. Tucker emphasized that overall graduate applications for fall 2026 are running well ahead of last year. The institution implemented a new graduate application platform last spring and has since centralized graduate, undergraduate, and international admissions operations under the leadership of Mykaela Waterfield, Director of Enrollment Communications and Operations. Dr. Tucker expressed confidence that the operational improvements will pay dividends in the months ahead.

Turning to fall 2026, Dr. Tucker reported that in-state admitted students are up 3 percent, while overall admitted students are flat. The flat overall figure reflects stabilization in out-of-state applications following last year's implementation of the Common Application, which initially generated a large but lower-yielding pool of out-of-state applicants. The institution is focusing on the in-state number, which yields at a substantially higher rate.

Dr. Tucker described two new initiatives in which UT Martin is participating. The Tennessee Direct Admission Program is a state pilot administered through the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and tied to the Tennessee Promise Scholarship. When students apply for Tennessee Promise, their application information is used to offer them direct guaranteed admission to the four-year and community colleges for which they meet admission criteria. UT Martin opted into the program, as did all participating four-year institutions in the state with the exception of UT Knoxville. Of approximately 360 applicants received through the program, 218 were new applicants to UT Martin. The institution will track how these students matriculate through the funnel.

The institution also continues to participate in the UT Access Collaborative, through which students who are placed on the wait list at, or denied by, UT Knoxville and who meet UT Martin's admission criteria are offered a place to begin their studies at UT Martin or one of the other UT campuses. Approximately 12 students enrolled at UT Martin through the collaborative this year, compared to five last year and six the year prior. The vast majority remain at UT Martin rather than transferring back to UT Knoxville.

Other indicators for fall 2026 are positive. Housing applications for first-year students are up 14 percentage points point-to-point. Summer Orientation and Registration open February 1, with dual-enrollment students given priority in early sessions. Transfer-admitted students are up 15 percent, and graduate applications are up 97 percent (85 compared to 43), albeit on a small base. The institution is conducting a broad marketing campaign to its own undergraduate students approaching graduation, offering them application fee waivers and encouraging them to apply to UT Martin's graduate programs. Faculty are also developing potential accelerated programs for the same audience.

Dr. Tucker turned to retention and student success. UT Martin's retention performance is at or above averages for both peer and aspirational peer institutions across measured categories. Reasons cited by departing students include proximity to home (the most common), financial considerations including the loss of HOPE scholarships, and housing constraints. Some otherwise academically successful students chose not to return last year, suggesting other factors at play, and the team continues to investigate.

The Library Learning Commons, which opened in fall 2025, has become a centralized destination for student academic support, including supplemental instruction, tutoring, and academic coaching. The space served 1,770 distinct students during the fall 2025 semester. Supplemental instruction visits increased by approximately 350 to 400 over comparable periods. Spring 2026 supplemental instruction comprises 33 sections against a goal of 40, supported through the Title III grant. Students participating in supplemental instruction show GPA gains of at least 0.25 points, with notable subject-level gains of 1.18 in Economics and 0.76 in Psychology.

The institution is adding full-time professional advisors in the College of Education, Health and Behavioral Sciences and the College of Engineering and Natural Sciences. The first professional advisor in the College of Education, Health and Behavioral Sciences will focus principally on nursing students, where first-year retention has historically been lower. Because nursing is the most-selected major on the application regardless of student preparation, a dedicated advisor will help students who decide nursing is not the right fit identify appropriate alternative pathways. The College of Engineering and Natural Sciences will be staffed with two professional advisors who will supplement the existing faculty advising model.

Dr. Tucker concluded by reminding the board that the institution's 10,000-student goal will surpass UT Martin's previous record enrollment of 8,469 set in fall 2010. She invited questions.

Stefan Maupin raised broader questions regarding the future of higher education in the context of artificial intelligence and large-scale workplace disruption. Drawing on his experience watching manufacturing job losses in the 1990s and early 2000s create demand for new credentialing pathways, he asked whether graduate-level credentials may, going forward, occupy the role that undergraduate credentials filled in earlier decades, particularly given announcements of significant AI-related workforce disruption and the prospect of new categories of jobs that have not yet been imagined. He encouraged the institution to be poised for that need and to ensure students are prepared for the shift.

Chairman Sparks compared current questions about AI to the introduction of the calculator into accounting practice when he was preparing for the CPA exam, observing that institutions must teach students to use new tools while preserving the foundational understanding that undergirds them. Chancellor Freeman added that the institution is not avoiding AI. UT Martin maintains a policy on AI use in the classroom, and Dr. Adnan Rasool, Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, leads informational sessions and faculty training on the effective use of AI in instruction. Dean Bibbee emphasized that higher education's essential role is cultivating critical thinkers capable of innovation, and that the institution has a responsibility to challenge students to think beyond what has come before. Dr. Tucker noted that the strategic enrollment plan includes movement toward a fully online undergraduate computer science degree, with potential expansion to a graduate program incorporating AI. The enrollment and retention update was received as a report of information; no action was required.

V. ATHLETICS UPDATE

Chairman Sparks introduced Vice Chancellor and Director of Athletics Kurt McGuffin to provide an update on athletics. Mr. McGuffin organized his presentation around three themes: the academic performance of student-athletes; current issues in college athletics, including conference realignment, name, image, and likeness (NIL) and revenue share, and the transfer portal; and athletic facilities.

Mr. McGuffin opened with academic performance and reported continued record-setting results. Approximately 500 student-athletes, managers, and student assistants are included in the cumulative GPA calculation. Fall 2025 cumulative GPA was 3.39, including 94 individuals with a 4.00 GPA and more than 323 above 3.00. Mr. McGuffin attributed the academic gains since fall 2018 to a deliberate transition from a study-hall model to a mentoring model in athletic academic advising and to the buy-in of student-athletes and coaches. He recognized Senior Associate Athletics Director for Internal Operations Ashley Bynum, who oversees compliance and academics, and Athletics Academic Advisors Corbin Jordan and Emily Ann Sparks, asking the board to congratulate them on the work they have done.

Mr. McGuffin then turned to conference realignment. Tennessee Tech's announced departure to the Southern Conference prompted UT Martin to evaluate alternative conference options, including a conference invitation that was reviewed jointly with Southeast Missouri State. After comprehensive analysis of travel costs and budgetary scale (the median budget in the alternative conference was approximately \$22.5 million, the highest was approximately \$32 million, and UT Martin's budget is approximately \$15.5 million), the institution elected to remain in the Ohio Valley Conference, of which it has been a member since 1993. UT Martin is currently among the top two or three in the conference by athletic budget. Mr. McGuffin expressed confidence that the conference's presidents and chancellors are unified in strengthening the league.

A search for a new Ohio Valley Conference commissioner is underway, led by the search firm WittKieffer. Chancellor Freeman is serving on the search committee. An announcement of a new commissioner is anticipated in March or April 2026. UT Martin continues to seek the addition of another football-playing institution to the conference to support a nine-team football schedule, which would allow the institution to schedule eight conference games annually.

Mr. McGuffin discussed the institution's decision to opt in to the new NIL and revenue share framework that emerged from the House settlement. As a consequence, certain roster sizes will be adjusted: football, in particular, will reduce from approximately 125 student-athletes to 105 over time, primarily through reductions in the walk-on population. Mr. McGuffin acknowledged that this change will reduce overall student-athlete tuition revenue and represents the most significant operational impact for the institution. NCAA distribution to UT Martin will be reduced by approximately \$300,000 annually for the next 10 years as part of the institution's share of settlement obligations. Approximately 50 to 60 student-athletes, primarily in football and men's and women's basketball, are anticipated to receive revenue share or NIL payments in the coming academic year. Procedures are being established to administer payments primarily through a UT Martin foundation account. Disbursements will be scheduled, likely quarterly, rather than provided as lump sums. Contracts will be one-year agreements similar in structure to athletic scholarship awards, preserving institutional flexibility in the event of transfer.

Regarding the transfer portal, Mr. McGuffin noted that football is now subject to a single portal window of January 2 through January 16, posing significant operational challenges. UT Martin received more mid-year football transfers this year than in any prior year, and enrollment services worked closely with the athletics staff to admit students after the January 8 start of classes. Of approximately 10,000 FBS and FCS football student-athletes who entered the transfer portal nationally, approximately 6,000 went unsigned. Roughly 60 percent of FCS athletes who entered the portal did not secure a roster spot. Basketball's transfer window has been reduced from 30 days to 15 days. Mr. McGuffin observed that the data may, in time, lead student-athletes to be more cautious about entering the portal.

On roster and sport sponsorship, Mr. McGuffin reported that UT Martin's student-athlete population has grown from approximately 330 when he became Director to approximately 500 today, an increase of approximately 50 percent. Stunt was approved as an emerging sport by the NCAA the prior week and adds approximately 40 student-athletes to the roster, none of whom are on athletic scholarship. Equestrian, which similarly does not draw heavily on scholarship dollars, has helped sustain student-athlete totals during the transition.

Mr. McGuffin closed his presentation with an update on athletic facilities. Recently completed projects include the baseball hitting facility and a comprehensive renovation of the baseball field, including a new fence, drainage system, and natural grass surface; replacement of the Elam Center court with a more cushioned, expanded surface; renovation of the men's basketball locker room (the women's basketball locker room having been renovated approximately five years ago); and relocation of the football weight room within the Student Life Center, doubling its previous square footage. Projects in progress or under fundraising include a football team room and breakout rooms in the former weight room space; conversion of the closed pool area into indoor turf space, which would benefit baseball, softball, soccer, and other teams while opening the door to hosting regional tournaments and generating auxiliary revenue; track and field surface improvements; and LED outdoor lighting at football, baseball, softball, soccer, beach volleyball, pickleball, and tennis facilities. Current lighting is inadequate for ESPN+ broadcast standards, requiring rental of supplemental lighting for football playoff games. The Elam Center received LED lighting two years ago to strong effect.

Chairman Sparks asked about the implications of student-athletes entering the transfer portal. Mr. McGuffin clarified that entry into the portal generally ends the student-athlete's relationship with UT Martin, although a small number return at the discretion of their coach. A board member asked about the risk of student-athletes signing contracts and then leaving the institution to litigate out of them. Mr. McGuffin and Senior Associate AD Bynum confirmed that UT Martin uses one-year contracts consistent with athletic scholarship terms, structures payments to back-load disbursements, and limits agreement values to amounts the institution can manage. Chairman Sparks closed the discussion by noting the rapid evolution of the NIL environment and the difficulty of predicting when the framework will stabilize. The athletics update was received as a report of information; no action was required.

VI. STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

Chairman Sparks introduced Jake Bynum, Chief of Staff to the Chancellor, to present a one-year update on the strategic plan approved by this board approximately one year ago and adopted by the UT Board of Trustees in February 2025. Mr. Bynum reminded the board that

the plan comprises five goals and 24 strategies, with additional underlying targets, encompassing approximately 40 initiatives in total. Strategy leads have been identified for each strategy, and hundreds of employees across the institution are engaged in implementation. The work, he emphasized, is not done in a vacuum: Chancellor Freeman was intentional from the outset in asking senior leaders to take ownership of these goals and strategies and to drive their achievement.

In an executive summary of progress, Mr. Bynum reported that approximately 87 percent of strategies have been initiated. Three targets are fully completed, 17 are actively in progress, and a small number remain uninitiated. Uninitiated items are generally awaiting external factors such as guidance from the UT system on compensation structure, additional policy direction, or scheduled survey cycles. Mr. Bynum noted, with a nod to the institution's communications team, that the team is constantly reminding stakeholders that the strategic plan is a marathon rather than a sprint and that not every initiative needs to be completed in the first six months. The strongest momentum is in enrollment, where fall 2025 priorities were exceeded with an approximately 8 percent enrollment increase year over year, and significant investments have also been made in wireless technology and housing.

Chairman Sparks asked Mr. Bynum to clarify the executive summary arithmetic, noting that 3 completed, 17 in progress, and 6 uninitiated total 26 against 24 strategies. Mr. Bynum confirmed that two additional underlying targets had been captured in the executive summary report and folded back into their parent strategies, accounting for the difference.

Mr. Bynum walked the board through each of the five goals. Under Goal One, sustainable enrollment growth, international enrollment grew by 51 percent, from 37 students to 56 students. Although modest in absolute terms, the growth is encouraging in the present federal environment. Mr. Bynum noted that as first-time, full-time freshman growth is expected to plateau over time, attention is shifting to graduate program expansion as a future driver of enrollment.

Under Goal Two, enhancing institutional reputation, the institution has added service delivery questions to the student satisfaction survey, providing a new mechanism to assess how well students are being served across the institution. The Center for Teaching and Learning is tracking faculty professional development and developing a badge and certificate system for recognized training completion. A new staff onboarding process and online handbook are in development. The NACADA advising survey will be administered biannually rather than annually due to cost considerations, with the next administration scheduled for fall 2026. Brand recognition efforts will use Hanover Research as a baseline, and a second campus scene survey is planned to achieve a higher response rate.

Under Goal Three, virtual and physical spaces, Mr. Bynum noted that this is the area where the largest future budget thinking will occur. Housing is at its highest occupancy rate in institutional history, although capacity has been reduced through the demolition of older facilities. Eight initiatives are active to add bed capacity on and off campus, with approximately \$5 million identified for new construction, renovation, furniture, and staffing. Technology improvements include 193 new wireless access points across Brehm, Gooch, Humanities, EPS, the library, the University Center, and residence halls; migration to a new wireless management system; and an expansion of campus internet capacity from 5 gigabytes per second to 10 gigabytes per second this spring, supporting approximately 64,000

concurrent devices. Canvas training will be embedded in new faculty orientation by summer 2026. The campus signage project received 581 survey responses, which are guiding phase one of internal signage; replacement is expected to begin in the second quarter of 2026 with completion by the end of the strategic plan period. Distance learning technology rooms are being prioritized in Latimer Smith and EPS, and twelve tutoring and consultation stations will be operational by spring 2026, doubling capacity for academic counseling services.

Under Goal Four, regional partnerships and the institution's commitment to West Tennessee, faculty-led project, contract, and budget templates have been finalized and are in use by the Center for Rural Innovation. Software has been secured to support economic impact studies, and a menu of proposal cost options is in development for community partners. A dedicated Town and Gown email address has been established for community engagement, and a community request form is being drafted. The institution has defined nine partnership categories: University Advancement; Career Planning; Grants and Research; Economic Development; Academic, Business, and Industry; Educational Partners; Student Affairs; Athletics; and Finance and Administration. Next steps include finalizing partnership definitions, launching a community portal, developing advisory board templates for each college, and creating a systematic annual reporting mechanism.

Under Goal Five, celebrating and promoting excellence across the campus community, the institution has developed the Skyhawk Summit Award, named in honor of Coach Pat Head Summitt and modeled conceptually on the UT Knoxville Torchbearer Award. The award will recognize individuals who exemplify Coach Summitt's values, work ethic, and contributions. Public announcement is planned for late spring 2026, with the inaugural selection occurring in spring 2027. The Chancellor's Leadership Academy is at the midpoint of its inaugural cohort. The current cohort includes 13 members, who have completed CliftonStrengths assessments, adjustment index evaluations, and executive coaching sessions. Recruitment for the second cohort, which will target approximately 12 members, is set to begin shortly. The Skyhawk Innovation Challenge framework has been developed, including marketing materials and a SharePoint site. Marketing is anticipated to begin in summer 2026, with an informational session in fall 2026 and an application deadline of approximately March 2027. The plan includes awarding up to \$100,000 in funds to support innovative solutions to regional challenges, modeled on the UT system's Grand Challenges grants. Web-based faculty profiles are now available for all faculty, allowing them to highlight their expertise and research. An experiential learning framework has been defined, and software for tracking student engagement is under consideration. Staff career ladders are on hold pending UT system guidance and the completion of a Huron compensation study.

Mr. Bynum closed by noting that capital and operational requests submitted by strategy leads currently total approximately \$6 million. These figures are not yet allocated; they have been submitted to inform future budget planning. He cautioned the board that this number will likely grow as additional strategies move into implementation. The strategic plan will continue to guide institutional investment decisions through 2030. The strategic plan update was received as a report of information; no action was required.

VII. J. HOUSTON AND DEBBIE GORDON CENTER FOR RURAL INNOVATION

Chairman Sparks invited Dr. Jeffrey Bibbee, Dean of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts, and Dr. Allan Sterbinsky, Director of the J. Houston and Debbie Gordon Center for Rural Innovation, to present an update on the Center.

Dean Bibbee provided context for the Center's creation. Small towns across West Tennessee and the broader region face profound questions about their future in a changing 21st-century economy. Some are thriving; some are struggling; all are working to determine what comes next. These challenges were at the heart of a UT Grand Challenges grant led by Dr. Adnan Rasool and Dr. Tony Delmond, which paired UT Martin students with small communities to provide internship opportunities while helping municipalities tackle the challenges they faced. As the grant concluded, students reported that they had seen the possibilities of community and public service, and partner communities reported a clearer sense of opportunity. With the creation of the new Department of Political Science and Global Studies in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts, support from the Office of Outreach and Economic Development, and a generous endowment from J. Houston and Debbie Gordon, the institution officially launched the Center within the College. Dean Bibbee introduced the Center's Director, Dr. Allan Sterbinsky, a former educator, community leader, and elected official whose 20 years as Mayor of Stanton, Tennessee, position him to lead the Center as a transformational presence in the region.

Dr. Sterbinsky opened by acknowledging Chairman Sparks's support of the town of Stanton during the Ford Motor Company manufacturing announcement, including assistance that contributed to the opening of the Stanton Cannery Cafe. He then described the realities of small-town government in West Tennessee: limited staff, limited budget, limited bench strength, and a long list of opportunities and dreams that lack strategic direction. The Center exists to help communities convert opportunity into action by providing two complementary services. The first is experiential learning placements, in which UT Martin students intern with local government partners on practical projects ranging from logo and graphic design to ordinance drafting to organization of grant compliance documentation. The second is faculty-developed reports, including economic development analyses, population and housing analyses, socioeconomic and traffic studies, and similar work products that smaller communities cannot otherwise access.

Of 17 internship applicants this cycle, the Center has budgeted to place approximately eight student interns. Henry County is currently hosting four interns, with capacity to expand to eight. Interns are paid \$12 per hour for 120 hours of work, equating to three credit hours of experiential learning. A \$192,000 grant proposal is under development with the Northwest Tennessee Development District covering a nine-county region; if funded, the proposal would support strategic and technical reports across the region. Dr. Sterbinsky illustrated the value of independent third-party economic analysis with the example of a mayor approaching a developer about a 200-unit housing subdivision: the developer requires hard, empirical evidence of demand and return on investment before committing capital, and the Center can provide that analysis. He noted that the Center's service area extends beyond Northwest Tennessee. Within an approximately 50-mile commuting radius of UT Martin lie counties in Arkansas, Kentucky, Missouri, and Illinois that could benefit from needs analyses and similar work products produced by the Center.

Dr. Sterbinsky emphasized that the Center is intentionally designed as a workforce development engine. Students leave UT Martin with both a diploma and a substantive resume

of practical work for real partners. The constraint, he noted, is funding: partner communities typically cannot pay intern stipends directly, and the Center is therefore continuously pursuing grants to underwrite student placements. The Center for Rural Innovation update was received as a report of information; no action was required.

VIII. APPROVAL OF FUTURE MEETING DATES

Chairman Sparks directed members to Tab 7 of the board packet, which presented potential future meeting dates: in 2026, May 15, the second 2026 date as listed in Tab 7, and September 18; and in 2027, January 22, May 14, and September 17. He noted that the dates are subject to change but provide a starting point for board members' calendars. Stefan Maupin moved to approve the dates as presented. Hal Bynum seconded the motion. Chairman Sparks called for a vote, and the motion carried unanimously with no opposition.

IX. ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON

Chairman Sparks announced that this would be his final meeting as Chairman and as a member of the Advisory Board. He underscored the importance of the chair role, including regular consultation with Chancellor Freeman and Chief of Staff Bynum on agenda development and institutional matters between meetings. He reminded the board that Mr. Alec Richardson will join as his successor, pending confirmation by the appropriate committees of the Tennessee General Assembly, and that Ms. Hampton's appointment is subject to the same confirmation process. Chairman Sparks then opened the floor for nominations.

Hal Bynum was nominated. No further nominations were offered. Dr. Dan McDonough moved that Hal Bynum be elected Chair of the UT Martin Advisory Board by acclamation. Dan Strasser seconded the motion. Chairman Sparks called for a vote, and the motion carried unanimously with no opposition. Mr. Hal Bynum was elected Chair. Chair-elect Bynum accepted the position with brief remarks of appreciation, observing with characteristic humor that he is no Art Sparks but will work to follow the example set during Chairman Sparks's tenure.

X. COMMENTS BY THE CHANCELLOR

Chancellor Yancy Freeman opened by welcoming new member Jennifer Hampton to the Advisory Board, expressing gratitude that she said yes to service before she was even formally asked. He also recognized Student Trustee Ashlee Mallon, a senior finance major in the College of Business and Global Affairs, for her ongoing service to the institution.

The Chancellor turned to the institution's 125th anniversary. UT Martin was founded in 1900 as the Hall-Moody Institute, with the first courses offered in 1901. To mark the occasion, the institution presented each board member with a pictorial history of UT Martin authored by Sam Richardson, Nathan Morgan, and Karen Elmore. The Paul Meek Library houses an updated room developed by Karen Elmore that contains additional photography and historical material on the institution. Additional anniversary celebrations are planned for fall 2026 to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the first courses, with invitations forthcoming.

The Chancellor expressed deep enthusiasm about the J. Houston and Debbie Gordon Center for Rural Innovation. He characterized UT Martin as an integral part of the West Tennessee community and the Center as a natural extension of the institution's role as a regional think tank that communities can turn to with complex problems. The Center is also, he noted, a consummate example of experiential learning, illustrating the equation of preparation plus opportunity equals success.

Chancellor Freeman shared findings from three recent surveys of the campus community. The COACHE faculty survey, administered through the UT system biannually, indicates that faculty are mission-driven and place high value on undergraduate teaching. Academic freedom is a noted area of concern, and the institution remains committed to preserving it in the classroom. The staff survey, administered through The McLean Group, identified compensation as the top staff concern. The Huron compensation study has been completed and is in the validation stage; the Chancellor anticipates a comprehensive plan and strategy will be ready by the fall semester and will be shared with the Advisory Board at that time. Staff also expressed strong interest in additional professional development, and the institution will continue to provide funding for that purpose. The annual student experience survey indicates that students value the small class sizes and personal relationships with faculty and staff that distinguish UT Martin from larger institutions. Their principal concerns are parking, which the Chancellor observed is more accurately described as a close-parking problem; housing capacity in the context of a 10,000-student goal; and wireless network performance. Wireless capacity has nearly doubled, although signal penetration through concrete and steel structures continues to be addressed.

Chancellor Freeman provided updates on facilities movement across campus. A significant portion of the administrative team will return to Hall-Moody in March 2026 following completion of renovation work. The College of Business and Global Affairs building is scheduled for demolition this summer; College of Business faculty and classrooms will be relocated, with the majority moving to the EPS building (currently undergoing mechanical systems upgrades on the Quad side), with additional faculty placements in humanities buildings and Clement Hall. The new College of Business building is in the design phase and is targeted for completion in fall 2029. Browning Hall is scheduled for demolition this summer; a new residence hall with 406 beds will be constructed in its place. Browning currently houses approximately 300 students against a capacity of 500 beds, resulting in a net increase of approximately 100 student beds on campus following completion of the new facility. The Chancellor acknowledged that the transition will require careful planning by Dr. Lewter and the student affairs and housing team but expressed confidence that students will be appropriately accommodated. He suggested that Dr. Lewter may present a more detailed housing report at a future Advisory Board meeting.

Chancellor Freeman closed his comments by thanking Chairman Sparks publicly for his leadership, encouragement, and support of the institution. He noted that Chairman Sparks is stepping away from the chairmanship but not away from UT Martin, and that the institution remains deeply grateful for his continued partnership.

XI. CLOSING REMARKS

Chairman Sparks offered closing remarks, expressing appreciation for the opportunity to serve and noting that he had verified the accuracy of the institutional history book with

longtime UT Martin associates Bob Carroll and Betty Giles. He issued a charge to the board: to continue advocating for UT Martin in their respective communities, to support enrollment by speaking with prospective students and their families, and to honor the institution's tradition of repaying past blessings through time, effort, or financial contribution. Repayment, he observed, is not an obligation but an honor and an opportunity to support the students who are on campus today and the students who will be on campus in the future, just as those before us made our own time at UT Martin possible. He thanked the staff and members behind the table for their service and concluded by encouraging the board to continue its work as an advisory body for the benefit of the Chancellor, the staff, and the students.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Sparks asked if there was any other business to come before the board. Hearing none, he called for a motion to adjourn. Hal Bynum moved to adjourn the meeting. Darby Self seconded the motion. Chairman Sparks called for a vote, and the motion carried unanimously with no opposition. The meeting was adjourned.