

# THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AT MARTIN ADVISORY BOARD

## Minutes of the Fall Meeting

The fall meeting of The University of Tennessee at Martin Advisory Board was held at 1:00 p.m. (CDT) on Friday, September 17, 2021, in the Boling University Center, Room 206AB, on the campus of The University of Tennessee at Martin.

### **I. Call to Order and Roll Call**

Chair Art Sparks welcomed the UT Martin Advisory Board members and guests to the regular fall meeting of the UT Martin Advisory Board. Chair Sparks requested a roll call to bring the meeting to order. The roll was called by Edie Gibson, Secretary to the Board, with the following members present:

Hal Bynum  
Kelsea Koonce  
Philip Smartt  
Art Sparks  
Johnny Woolfolk

With five members of the Advisory Board in attendance onsite, a quorum was announced. Not available to attend the meeting were Monice Hagler and Julia Wells. Others participating included UT Martin administrative and leadership staff. The meeting was streamed live for the convenience of the University community, the general public, and the media. A recording of the proceedings will be uploaded to the UT Martin Advisory Board website, following the meeting.

### **II. Opening Remarks**

Chair Sparks welcomed Advisory Board members to the fall 2021 meeting. Chair Sparks began the meeting by welcoming Kelsea Koonce, a junior studying Agriculture, to her first official meeting as the Student Member of the UTM Advisory Board. She will serve in her role as Student Member for the 2021-2022 term.

Chair Sparks next called on Chancellor Carver to provide a welcome and an update on COVID. After a brief welcome, Chancellor Carver stated he was pleased with how the campus is responding to the current COVID protocols. Yesterday, the campus reported 31 active student cases and 3 active employee cases. UTM students' commitment to return to face-to-face instruction is strong, and generally speaking, our students have taken to the indoor mask mandate. Our COVID mandates align with transmission rates on campus and in this region, as reported by area hospitals, in conjunction with a UTHSC viral expert and the Emergency Management Policy Team. UTM is carefully balancing a safe environment with a true residential experience. Following this first month of classes, Chancellor Carver noted that he is pleased with the campus opening but agrees that we are still plowing new ground during this pandemic.

### **III. Approval of Minutes**

Chair Sparks directed the members to a copy of the January 22, 2021, minutes from the regularly scheduled winter meeting of the Advisory Board for approval. With no corrections or modifications, the minutes were approved.

**Motion: Hal Bynum moved to adopt the UT Martin Advisory Board meeting minutes for the January 22, 2021, meeting, as presented in the meeting materials, and Philip Smartt seconded the motion. An oral vote on the motion was taken, and the motion carried unanimously.**

#### **IV. Enrollment Update**

Chair Sparks invited Dr. Philip Acree Cavalier, Provost and Sr. Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, to present an overview of fall enrollment and any corresponding environmental impacts. Provost Cavalier acknowledged that enrollment trends following the COVID-19 outbreak remain strong at flagship campuses but have dipped among regional comprehensive institutions. UTM recruited 1,043 incoming students this fall, which represents ~16% yield rate from applied to admitted students. UTM saw solid application numbers and responses to the intent to enroll survey, but a larger than normal summer melt. UTM's team will be dissecting the summer melt data to determine if these students enrolled elsewhere or not at all. An early guess is that students thought paying for college wasn't going to work this semester; therefore, we are circling back to re-recruit each of them. This fall, our transfer market was down a little, but the university was more successful with the re-admit market, which might be a positive sign from students who stopped out in the middle of COVID dissatisfied with a completely online format. The most significant population decline involved our returning students. Retention of first to second year students at 69.9%, accounted for a 4% drop from last year but was not the only issue; attrition among the sophomores and juniors also played a role. UTM is actively re-recruiting these students with a program called ReUp, a program utilized by Admissions over the past couple of years designed to target stop-outs. A primary concern of our students is that we will quickly return to an online-only format. The university is exploring initiatives to change the first-year experience and determine students' need post-COVID, which may not align with their needs pre-COVID. The state is discussing learning loss and how to best prepare students to succeed in higher education and for careers.

Moving forward, UTM has engaged the nationally renowned, John Gardner Institute Foundations of Excellence to conduct a first-year self-survey and construct an action plan for improving the first-year experience. This self-survey will require a massive data collection process, which has already begun. Faculty, staff, and students will coalesce the data and discuss nine dimensions of the first-year experience. Our faculty will engage first-year learning paths and the issues surrounding learning loss, which feeds our SACSCOC reaccreditation QEP (Quality Enhancement Plan) requirement. At the conclusion of this project, we will be prepared to implement new strategies to enhance our student experience. Additionally, the university will hire a Director of Retention to target student persistence and graduation factors with a focus on the best and most impactful initiatives. Strategies will target recruiting our summer melt students, focusing on low-income students, reviewing scholarship packaging, and evaluating geofencing patterns to entice students to return to UTM this spring or in the upcoming fall. More than half of this year's summer melt reside in Shelby County.

#### **V. New Academic Programs**

With Chair Sparks' permission, Provost Cavalier moved on to the next topic of new academic programs. He stated that, through the university's work with the SEP (Strategic Enrollment Planning) process, our team has been evaluating our degree offerings and growing programs for high-demand areas. We have already implemented a few offerings and are working on other programs, in addition to our efforts involving retention. One challenge involves the timing required for our shared faculty governance process to be completed prior to scheduling alignments with THEC and then seeking UT Board approval. A case in point is the new B.S. in Cybertechnology, which does not become available until next year. This degree was identified as the greatest opportunity for growth. Regionally, data trends from other institutions demonstrated computer science enrollment growth after adding a cybertechnology program. However, our recruiting timeframe will now sync well with the Fall 2022 opening of the new Latimer Engineering and Science Building. UTM's program will be built around computer science, rather than business enterprise software, allowing our students to understand the concepts and apply applications

more broadly to better prepare graduates for today's job market and for future jobs that don't yet exist. The program will seek ABET accreditation status.

In another academic arena, we successfully advanced the Vet Tech and Vet Science program from a concentration under an Animal Science degree to a B.S. degree. Overtime, we plan to grow the program size by adding 50-75 students through recruiting from a broader region. UTM offers one of a handful of Vet Tech programs nationally. This year alone, our program successfully placed 17 students in Veterinary schools. If the state was able to double the number of veterinarians, it might cover the perceived needs in Tennessee.

Equally exciting is a plan to add a new master's degree in Criminal Justice, effective spring 2022. This degree will target corrections administration and law enforcement administration personnel, by allowing students and professionals options to pursue stand-alone corrections or law enforcement certifications, or with a master's degree. Another advantage of this degree is the consideration of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), which makes the program more appealing to experienced professionals.

On a final note, a proposal to offer a new B.S. in Construction Management is currently moving through the faculty governance process. The data gathered through the SEP supported the need for engineering students challenged by Calculus 3 to have an off-ramp option that keeps them in the Engineering field. Be watching for a master's in Music Education to provide another degree for educators in K-12 classrooms as it moves forward.

In response to a Board conversation, Chancellor Carver responded that opening UT Southern had not triggered a significant drain on other UT campus enrollments. UT Southern has an opportunity to recruit different students. Enrollment data will continue to be monitored regarding enrollment trends and summer melt. Data retrieved from the National Student Clearinghouse as well as limited information received from student exit surveys will provide the basis for future conversations. Knowing if students transfer to two-year or four-year institutions, didn't go back to college, or if they attended multiple institutions can be revealing. A genuine concern for high school and college students, who have gone through COVID, is how prepared will they be academically, socially, and other ways compared with previous trends. In terms of academic preparedness, educators are concerned nationally about possible deficiencies and are engaged in on-going discussions about ACT and SAT testing.

Provost Cavalier noted that returning to the classroom is presenting an adjustment challenge for a large population of students, many of whom did not experience in-person classes last year. Once we better understand the impact of the pandemic, we will need to determine how to address the various issues, keeping in mind no one size fits all with populations and niches. A growing attribute of our students is their need to work to cover the cost of their educational expenses, which necessitates our need to continue affirming the importance of a college education as a viable option and an important personal goal. Growing our educational options at the Centers is an important consideration to support place-bound students and to broaden our recruiting footprint. Looking at state needs, the shortage of veterinarians to treat large animals in rural areas was discussed. In a 2017-2018 study regarding academic areas of expansion, the data documented that the two most expensive educational programs to grow are dentistry and veterinary science. Although, Vets serving a small animal will make a better salary, which is important to reimburse educational expenses, access to Wildwood Farm and Ag courses may create an enrollment pipeline of student interest in working with large animals to fill this void.

In response to a question posed to Provost Cavalier, he responded that UTM continues to offer our traditional online programming but is primarily back to a face-to-face experience in keeping with our student preferences, except for students with an active case or in quarantine. A very small number of faculty with health risks were granted an exception to teach online. Chancellor Carver added that the headcount of students enrolled fulltime on the main campus, without the Centers and Online, totals about

5,000 students. The number of dual enrollment students is down about 15 students, which is likely attributed to UTM not being able to get into the high schools to recruit during COVID. Chair Sparks commended the Chancellor and Provost for the campus efforts to be fluid and flexible in response to the COVID challenges and addressing regional needs with academic programs like cybersecurity, vet tech programs, and criminal justice.

## **VI. Comments by the Chancellor**

Although it has been a strange start to the semester, Chancellor Carver stated that this year's start has been better than last year. He went on to address facility improvements, stating that we are looking forward to sweeping out the sawdust in Clement Hall at the completion of that upgrade. Plans are to relocate Admissions, the Bursar's office, Financial Aid, and open a One-Stop Shop in support of our students. As part of the update, some construction materials have been repurposed like beautiful authentic Tennessee marble. The Chancellor promised to invite back Advisory Board members for a tour during the Clement Hall Open House. On-time in fall 2022, the campus will be celebrating the opening of the Latimer Engineering and Science Building with classes. Equally important projects, which might not be as flashy, include mechanical upgrades for two older facilities, the first is a \$14 million mechanical facility upgrade to the Johnson EPS Building, which will vastly improve the functionality of the facility while adding new classroom space gained from repurposed laboratory areas, and the second, the Hall-Moody Administration Building, which will also see an upgrade, following the permanent relocation of several student service operations to Clement Hall along with a temporary relocation (~18 months) of the remainder of the administrative offices until the upgrades are completed.

Skyhawk Athletics has gotten off to a great start with our fall sports. UTM hosted Family Weekend, September 10-12, with ~750 family members and a great football crowd of ~6,500 watching the Shyhawks pull off a win over the Samford Bulldogs. The Chancellor further bragged on ~500 student-athletes, who during fall and spring terms amid the pandemic, earned a 3.28 GPA and 3.29 GPA respectively, which also marks record term GPA averages. This achievement was only possible with assistance from across the campus in support of our student-athletes. On a final note, the Skyhawks hosted their first Cross Country meet in a decade and a half; we are excited to be up and running again.

With Institutional Marketing ramping up, the public will see a lot more of our campus. When looking at enrollment and new programs, you must advertise to keep your message out. To facilitate this need, UTM has hired our first fulltime videographer at a time when media outlets are not often able to travel to our sites to develop their own material. UTM will also be pushing out its own media content with the support a Social Media Coordinator. Fundraising has enjoyed an excellent year, highlighted by a \$87.8 million gift with Wildwood Farm. Although, every aspect of the campus has been impacted by the pandemic, during the past two years, our Advancement team has increased to ~5,000 unique donors, which is up from three and four years ago; the team continues to pitch large proposals and is not resting on their laurels.

In a quick update, Dr. Mark McCloud, who spoke with us about diversity, is offering RISE to a cohort of 40 freshmen of color, providing a curriculum of courses, mentoring, and personal development classes. The primary focus is to improve the retention of our students of color; an update will be brought back to the Board on the success of this pilot program.

UTM experienced a wild 18 months, the UTM team has really worked hard to open the residence halls and provide face-to-face classes. Shannon Deal and her team in Student Health and Counseling Services have been fearless and have given us great advice on physical and mental health from the frontlines. The same commitment has been shown by Brad Burkett and his facilities team with cleaning and sanitation work, noting that some of these COVID initiatives will continue as good safety practices, i.e.: how we bring in air to our buildings, the types of filters we use, and the way we fog and disinfect at night. The Public Safety team and Chief Belew also stepped up with a real visible presence on campus during

COVID. Each day in September, Chief Belew is bringing advocacy for suicide prevention with a seven-mile walk, run or ride. He introduced a campus companion animal, Morton, who brightens people's day and is probably the most photographed dog in the country. Petra McPhearson is over both the Physical Plant and Public Safety and is doing a great job. We are grateful for Student Affairs offering innovative programming and keeping the residence halls safe. The Athletics staff, coaches, and trainers have stepped up their efforts directed at ensuring our athletes can travel, stay eligible to play, and meet the NCAA testing requirements. UTM's Library staff answered the bell, as a true customer service focused group on our campus; Dean Nordberg and his team are constantly looking at how to better serve our students, faculty and staff during COVID, finding ways to serve and solutions to do so. Bringing in-person classes back, our faculty are engaged with face-to-face instruction, despite some nervousness, they are making it work. The proof is that our students are telling us great things about being back, thanks to Dr. Philip Smartt, Dr. Anderson Starling (Faculty Senate President) and their ~300 colleagues. Chancellor Carver bragged, "we've got great people," acknowledging that he may have left many off this list, he summed up his pride in how our folks are pulling together to make things work, with many days feeling like its hand-to-hand combat, concluding "I'm awful proud of the campus team."

Chair Sparks prompted the Chancellor to share an announcement of UTM alumnus, Brandon Rowland's, '04 and '06, induction into the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame. After an unfortunate situation when Brandon was young, he received a prosthetic leg. This year Brandon with a team from Jackson, TN, won a World Championship in Wheelchair Basketball. Chancellor Carver added that Brandon is also a phenomenal golfer and an inspiration to others.

In a clarification statement, Chancellor Carver explained that some administrative units will not return to the Hall-Moody Administration Building after the systems upgrade, while other returning administrators will possibly return to a new location, enabling units to receive needed space. HR and Equity and Diversity are examples of units that will benefit from more space.

Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration Petra McPhearson addressed a question of how the University is dealing with less money from the enrollment dip. She reported that the campus is working within the Strategic Plan to address the pending enrollment cliff and to implement and expand academic programming.

## **VII. Closing Remarks by Chair**

In closing, Chair Sparks stated the University videos featuring Chancellor Carver do as much for this university as other activities. The videos convey a Chancellor who loves the students and really cares about the institution. Chair sparks encouraged the Board to watch these videos and expressed curiosity about the 2021 holiday video.

Chair Sparks concluded his remarks, stating that he and Member Julia Wells' terms of service expired on June 30, 2021, except that the statute affirms that Board member service continues until the Governor appoint/reappoints the vacancies, which must be confirmed by the General Assembly in session. Chair Sparks' role as chair continues through June 30, 2022, in conjunction with his extended Board membership. In the event his appointment is not continued, Chair Sparks expressed his honor in serving on the inaugural Advisory Board as Member and Chair. He added that he hopes to be reappointed to continue this good work and the great opportunity. He expressed his indebtedness to Chancellor Emeritus Bob Smith for making some tough decisions during his time at UTM and for seeing through those decisions and to Dr. Carver for his leadership, noting we couldn't have gotten a better person. In response, Chancellor Carver congratulated Chair Sparks on being the best (and only) Chair of the Board and advancing the Board as well as setting a high standard for Board service.

The next meeting of the Advisory Board will be the Winter Meeting scheduled for January 21, 2022, held in a similar format as this meeting.

**VIII. Adjournment**

With no further business to come before the Board, a motion to adjourn was made by Johnny Woolfolk and seconded by Hal Bynum. The meeting adjourned at 2:02 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Eddie Gibson, Secretary