

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AT MARTIN ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES

The University of Tennessee at Martin Advisory Board convened on September 19, 2025, 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, 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.

II. Opening Remarks

Chancellor Yancy Freeman opened his remarks by expressing enthusiasm about the start of the fall semester. He noted that the university is now in its fourth week of classes, though it still feels as though the semester began just yesterday. The Chancellor reflected on the first day students returned to campus, noting the excitement of seeing the campus filled with activity again. He recalled arriving on campus that Sunday and being struck by the difficulty of finding parking, the sight of students walking everywhere, and the realization that it took ten minutes to traverse what would normally be a quick walk. Rather than frustration, Chancellor Freeman expressed genuine joy at witnessing the campus come alive with the return of students and faculty, stating that the energy across campus has been palpable and that the semester has started with real momentum.

Chancellor Freeman took a moment to recognize Ashlee Mallon, who was present in the audience. Miss. Mallon is a senior finance major in the College of Business and Global Affairs and currently serves as UT Martin's student representative on the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees. The Chancellor explained that it is UT Martin's turn to have a student serve in this important role, and he expressed confidence that Miss. Mallon will represent the institution exceptionally well throughout her term.

The Chancellor then asked the board to join him in observing a moment of silence in honor of former University of Tennessee President John Petersen. President Petersen served the University of Tennessee system from 2004 until 2009 and passed away on September 11, 2025. Chairman Sparks had previously discussed this tribute with the Chancellor, and the board paused in respectful remembrance of President Petersen's service and contributions to the university system.

III. Approval of the Minutes from the Previous Meeting

Chairman Sparks moved to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. He offered board members the option to review the full minutes or proceed directly to approval.

Stefan Maupin moved to approve the minutes as presented without a full reading. Dan Strasser seconded the motion. Chairman Sparks called for a vote, and the motion carried unanimously with no opposition.

IV. Recognition Of UT President's Award Winners

Chairman Sparks noted that each year, the University of Tennessee recognizes outstanding employees across the system with Presidential Awards, and that UT Martin consistently produces exceptional honorees. He took a moment to recognize this year's recipients from the Martin campus.

Judy Sandefer, who was present at the meeting, received the President's Award in the Excel in All We Do category. Chairman Sparks asked Ms. Sandefer to stand and be recognized, expressing appreciation for her dedicated service to the university and her contributions to keeping operations running smoothly.

Gina McClure was recognized for receiving the Optimistic and Visionary Award. Although Ms. McClure was unable to attend the meeting, Chairman Sparks encouraged board members to congratulate her when they encounter her at university events and athletic competitions throughout the year.

Kameron Echols, who attended the meeting, received the Presidential Award for Embrace Diversity. Chairman Sparks recognized Mr. Echols and thanked him for his contributions to fostering an inclusive campus environment.

Tara Tansil-Gentry also received the Embrace Diversity Award. Chairman Sparks noted that she had already spoken with him about the upcoming women's basketball matchup between Union City and Greenfield, demonstrating her continued engagement with the university community and regional athletics.

Finally, Ben Jones was recognized as the recipient of the UT Foundation President's Award. Chairman Sparks emphasized that these honorees represent the caliber of dedicated professionals who make UT Martin an outstanding institution, and he encouraged everyone to express appreciation to them whenever possible.

V. ENROLLMENT AND RETENTION UPDATE

Chairman Sparks introduced Dr. Destin Tucker, Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management and Student Success, to present the fall 2025 enrollment report. Chairman Sparks encouraged board members to prepare challenging questions, noting that the relatively short meeting agenda would allow ample time to discuss this important topic.

Dr. Tucker began by expressing her appreciation for the opportunity to share what she characterized as overwhelmingly positive news. Fall 2025 enrollment stands at 8,101 students, up nearly 8% from the previous fall. Dr. Tucker emphasized the significance of this achievement, noting that it marks the second consecutive year of 8% enrollment growth, placing UT Martin in an exceptionally strong position among Tennessee institutions of higher education.

The current enrollment figure ties UT Martin's second-highest institutional enrollment, matching the 2009 total of 8,101 students. Dr. Tucker expressed confidence that next year's enrollment will surpass this historical benchmark, noting that the institution's highest-ever enrollment was 8,469 students in 2010.

The student body this fall represents remarkable geographic diversity, with students hailing from 29 countries, 40 states, and 87 of Tennessee's 95 counties. The geographic distribution shows that approximately 92% of students are Tennessee residents, 7.2% come from other states, and 0.7% are international students.

Dr. Tucker presented the enrollment growth model developed by Ryan McDonald, Director of Institutional Research, which outlines a roadmap to achieve Chancellor Freeman's goal of reaching 10,000 students. She explained that when the Chancellor first articulated this ambitious target, many on campus wondered how it could possibly be achieved. Mr. McDonald's model addressed this question by outlining a clear pathway based on 5% annual growth in new student populations each fall, incremental increases each spring, and average retention and progression rates calculated from the previous five years. The model not only tracks overall enrollment but also monitors specific subpopulations, including first-year students, dual-enrollment students, undergraduate progression, and graduate students, enabling the enrollment

management team to tailor recruitment, retention, and program development efforts accordingly.

Fall 2025 enrollment significantly exceeded the model's projection of 7,911 students, surpassing the target by 2.4%. Dr. Tucker noted that this outperformance provides a head start toward the fall 2026 goal and that Mr. McDonald will analyze the fall census data to identify opportunities to adjust the model. Importantly, the institution exceeded projections for total and undergraduate enrollment, while graduate enrollment fell just short of the benchmark by 0.1%.

A particularly encouraging indicator was the full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment, which increased by 8.1%- outpacing the headcount increase by 0.2 percentage points. Dr. Tucker explained that this suggests not only that more students are enrolling but also that students are taking heavier course loads, which is a positive indicator of engagement and retention. She characterized undergraduate momentum as the primary driver of overall success, with the institution outperforming the enrollment model in several key areas while also identifying significant opportunities for growth in graduate programs.

Examining specific student populations, Dr. Tucker reported that first-year student enrollment increased by 9% over the previous year, marking the second consecutive year of 9% growth in this crucial population. 10% of incoming first-year students come from out of state, with Illinois and Kentucky as the top feeder states. In Tennessee, Shelby County remains the largest source of first-year students, accounting for 12% of the incoming class. Weakley and Gibson counties each contribute 7%, followed by Obion County at 6%, Carroll County at 5%, and Madison and Dyer counties each at 4%. While UT Martin maintains a strong presence in West Tennessee, the institution continues to gain momentum in Middle and East Tennessee as well.

Transfer student enrollment presented a different picture. Throughout the year, the enrollment management team anticipated declines in this area, as applications consistently lagged behind the previous year. However, late additions, including student athletes and various other factors, resulted in a final increase of 0.3%- essentially one additional student compared to the previous year. Dr. Tucker characterized this as a win that the team would gladly claim, while acknowledging that transfer enrollment remains below the growth model's projections and represents an area of opportunity. She noted that potential changes to NCAA transfer portal windows could significantly impact transfer enrollment patterns, potentially shifting some transfers from fall to spring semesters, and that the enrollment model will be adjusted accordingly as these policy changes are finalized.

Dual enrollment continues to grow, with a 16% increase over the previous year, bringing the total to over 2,000 students. Dr. Tucker emphasized that these students serve a dual purpose: they contribute to current enrollment figures while also building a pipeline of students who may transition to full-time enrollment after high school graduation. Erica Bell, who oversees dual enrollment operations, reported significant growth in Hamilton County, particularly at Soddy Daisy High School and Hixson High School. Additional strong gains came from South Gibson, Brighton, Fayette Ware, and several other area schools. The dual enrollment team has focused on providing individualized support to faculty and students, resulting in more students enrolling in additional courses and returning semester after semester to accumulate credits.

Returning undergraduate enrollment increased by 6%, reflecting stability in retention efforts. Dr. Tucker addressed first-year retention, noting that while retention dipped slightly from the previous year, the current 77% rate is the second-highest in eight years. She characterized this as a strong signal that student success efforts are working. The enrollment management team tracked retention trends throughout the summer, receiving weekly updates from Dr. Brad Baumgartner showing figures holding relatively steady until the fee payment deadline, after which other end-of-summer factors contributed to a slight decline.

Dr. Tucker provided a preliminary analysis of students who did not return. Approximately 60 students, representing about 20% of non-returning students, were academically ineligible. However, 160 students were eligible to return but chose not to, and notably, this group had an average GPA of 2.930, indicating that academics was not the barrier to their continued enrollment. Student success counselors are conducting a detailed analysis to identify the factors influencing these decisions and to develop strategies to reduce attrition in the coming years.

One promising initiative was the bridge grant program, which supported students who lost their academic scholarships. Students must maintain a 2.75 cumulative GPA to retain their academic scholarships, and those who fell below this threshold but remained in good academic standing were offered a bridge scholarship, a smaller amount for one semester intended to communicate the university's continued belief in their potential. These students have the opportunity to regain their full scholarship by raising their GPA in either the spring semester or the following fall semester. Dr. Tucker reported that many students took advantage of the program, and the university observed improved retention among this group.

Overall undergraduate retention has reached its highest level in recent years, up 5 percentage points since 2020. Dr. Tucker attributed this improvement to a collective effort by faculty and staff to increase student support and remove barriers. She highlighted the comprehensive academic catalog refresh that streamlined the general education curriculum, noting that this hard work is now paying dividends in improved retention. The institution has also reduced unnecessary registration holds, expanded tutoring offerings, enhanced academic coaching, and increased supplemental instruction availability.

Looking ahead, Dr. Tucker announced the recent opening of the Library Learning Commons, which she described as a significant investment in retention and graduation outcomes. This new space will house the academic coaching hub for most subject areas, providing students with a single location to receive assistance with virtually any academic need. She expressed excitement about the potential impact of this centralized support resource.

Dr. Tucker concluded her formal presentation by stating the next enrollment goal: 8,348 students by fall 2026. She expressed confidence that the institution will achieve this target through the same strategies that have driven recent success: focused recruitment, barrier removal, student success support, and collaboration across every corner of the institution.

Chairman Sparks opened the floor for questions, expressing confidence that the institution would not only meet but potentially exceed the stated goal, noting that another 8% increase would push enrollment to approximately 8,700 students. Dr. Tucker responded enthusiastically, noting that such an outcome would establish a new all-time enrollment record.

Chairman Sparks inquired about progress on eliminating obstacles to the acceptance of transfer credit, an issue the board has discussed in previous meetings. Dr. Tucker reported significant improvement in this area, attributing progress to the streamlined general education curriculum. She noted that if a student satisfies a general education requirement at another Tennessee institution, that requirement is now satisfied at UT Martin as well, even if the specific courses differ. She credited Dr. Stephanie Kolitsch, Provost, with leadership on this initiative and offered to defer detailed questions to her if needed.

Chairman Sparks followed up by asking whether the institution tracks where transfer students go after leaving UT Martin, distinguishing this from athletic transfers, which operate under different dynamics. Dr. Tucker acknowledged that this data is not currently systematically analyzed, though some information is available when students request transcripts for other institutions. She noted that National Student Clearinghouse data could be leveraged for this purpose, adding that the institution currently uses Clearinghouse data primarily to

analyze where accepted students who did not enroll ultimately matriculated, helping to inform competitive positioning strategies.

Regarding retention comparisons with peer institutions, Chairman Sparks asked how UT Martin's 85% overall retention rate compares with comparable and aspirational peers. Dr. Tucker reported that the institution performs at or above average compared to both peer groups, a finding that Dr. Freeman confirmed. Chairman Sparks noted that UT Martin ranked second in the UT system, behind only UT Southern, though he observed that UT Southern's smaller size provides certain advantages in achieving percentage increases. He commended the enrollment management team for their outstanding performance and expressed confidence that the institution has a strong chance of reaching 10,000 students by 2030. Dr. Tucker accepted this challenge with enthusiasm, noting that once that milestone is achieved, the team will immediately begin asking what comes next; though she added with a smile that they were not yet ready to announce the subsequent target publicly.

Chairman Sparks referenced UT System President Randy Boyd's stated goal for the 2020s: to be the greatest decade in the history of the UT System, joking that this aspiration would naturally be replaced on January 1, 2030, with a goal for the new decade to be even better. He emphasized that growth is good and commended the entire team for their achievements.

Dan Strasser offered congratulations to Dr. Tucker and the entire enrollment team, calling the across-the-board increases truly impressive. He then posed two questions: first, the status of international student recruitment; and second, efforts to recruit military-affiliated students.

Dr. Tucker acknowledged that international student enrollment did not meet this year's goals. The primary challenges were students struggling to secure visa appointments and to navigate other bureaucratic barriers. However, she emphasized that the institution has not abandoned its international recruitment strategy. Following a recent meeting with Chancellor Freeman and Provost Kolitsch, the team decided to continue pursuing international growth with a more measured approach. The ultimate goal remains 500 international students, and for the coming year, the target is 25 additional international students by fall 2026. Dr. Tucker noted that athletic teams have contributed to international enrollment, with the majority of the 0.7% international student population being student athletes.

Regarding military students, Dr. Tucker reported that UT Martin employs a veteran services coordinator whose primary responsibility is meeting with veteran students and those receiving veterans benefits, providing support from onboarding through graduation. The new strategic enrollment plan includes provisions to potentially add another staff member to enhance outreach,

particularly through partnerships with UT Martin centers in surrounding areas. She emphasized that the institution serves military students well and is committed to expanding these efforts.

Chancellor Freeman elaborated on the international enrollment challenge, identifying it as the strategy about which he has been most concerned throughout his tenure. Unlike local or state-level recruitment, international enrollment carries federal implications largely beyond the institution's control. The new federal administration has implemented changes that have created additional obstacles for students navigating the visa process. However, Chancellor Freeman believes the situation will stabilize, and the institution will adapt. The decision was made to stay the course while slightly scaling back aggressive targets, treating international enrollment growth as a marathon rather than a sprint.

Chairman Sparks inquired about the performance of the university's satellite centers, particularly the Springfield Center, as the newest location. Dr. Tucker indicated there had been some challenges in Springfield this year, and Chancellor Freeman explained that the center had been temporarily closed for renovations, which impacted enrollment of on-site students. The facility has reopened and is fully operational, and the Chancellor anticipates strong enrollment going forward. In positive news, the Parsons Center achieved its highest enrollment ever when dual enrollment students are included, and overall center enrollment increased this year.

Hal Bynum asked about the conversion rate of dual enrollment students to full-time enrollment after high school graduation. Dr. Tucker reported that approximately 25% of dual enrollment students currently transition to UT Martin as first-year students. The institution actively recruits this population by waiving application fees and offering priority registration for orientation as incentives. She acknowledged that, because high schools select the dual-enrollment institution rather than individual students, some students may not initially consider UT Martin as their primary choice for full-time enrollment. However, she noted that faculty teaching dual-enrollment courses can serve as the university's best ambassadors, and the institution continually explores ways to strengthen outreach to this important pipeline.

Stefan Maupin inquired about graduate student enrollment relative to peer institutions and whether this represents a growth opportunity. Dr. Tucker confirmed that graduate enrollment presents significant growth potential and that the institution has implemented restructuring to improve operations in this area. Mykaela Waterfield, Director of Enrollment Communications and Operations, has been meeting with all graduate program coordinators to streamline application processes and admissions procedures. Dr. Tucker cited

research indicating that the institution that accepts a prospective graduate student first is typically the one to enroll that student, making operational efficiency critical to competitive success. Graduate admissions operations have been consolidated under the same umbrella as undergraduate admissions, where the institution has demonstrated considerable success, with similar improvements expected. Additionally, a new graduate program in public health is in very early planning and research stages, representing another avenue for potential growth.

Dr. Dan McDonough raised a question about enrollment trends beyond UT Martin, citing a Chicago Tribune article that found that while the University of Illinois system has performed well, other Illinois institutions have struggled significantly. He asked whether similar dynamics are present in Tennessee.

Chancellor Freeman responded that he has received preliminary, unofficial information about enrollment performance across the state. Several institutions experienced substantial enrollment increases, with Austin Peay performing particularly well and UT Southern also showing strong results. UT Martin ranked among the highest percentage increases statewide. However, other institutions did not fare as well this fall. The Chancellor noted that these figures are preliminary, as institutions are still submitting their 14-day census numbers and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission has not yet released official comparative data. He confirmed that last year, UT Martin had the highest percentage increase in the state, and this year finished just one-tenth of a percentage point behind UT Southern, indicating continued excellent performance.

VI. STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

Chairman Sparks introduced Jake Bynum, Chief of Staff to the Chancellor, to present an update on the strategic plan. Mr. Bynum noted that this presentation represented the first opportunity for the Advisory Board to see the new strategic plan dashboard and the communication and tracking strategy developed to monitor progress.

Mr. Bynum explained that from the very beginning of the strategic planning process, Chancellor Freeman was intentional about establishing three core objectives. First, the plan would be a living document, not a static report that sits on a shelf. Second, the university would maintain transparency with both internal and external stakeholders about progress and challenges. Third, the institution would be held accountable through data-driven assessment of progress. These principles have guided every aspect of implementation planning.

The strategic plan encompasses five ambitious goals to be achieved over a five-year period, supported by 24 distinct strategies. Each strategy has been assigned to designated leads, and more than 30 faculty, staff, and, in some cases, community members have been engaged to help ensure accountability and drive results. Each strategy has a single individual with full accountability for outcomes, providing clarity on who is responsible when the Chancellor and campus leadership request progress reports.

Mr. Bynum explained that strategy leads have the flexibility to recruit additional expertise from across campus and may delegate operational responsibilities, while retaining ultimate accountability for results. Nearly every cabinet member has been assigned to at least one strategy team, with several serving as leads for multiple strategies. Mr. Bynum emphasized that these leads are, in his words, “the throat to choke”-the individuals who will be expected to explain both successes and any shortfalls in achieving strategic objectives.

He highlighted two individuals deserving particular recognition for their leadership roles. Provost Stephanie Kolitsch, who was not the strategy lead when the plan was initially passed, has since assumed responsibility for four strategies and embraced them wholeheartedly. Director Alisha Melton leads seven of the 24 strategies, making her the most prolific strategy lead in the organization. Mr. Bynum noted that while all leads are performing admirably, these two individuals merit special acknowledgment.

The reporting framework employs a multi-tiered system designed to ensure transparency and accountability at every level. Strategy leads provide regular updates through structured quarterly reports and must be prepared for additional reporting as needed. For example, if a community organization expresses interest in a specific goal or initiative, the relevant strategy lead would be identified to provide information to that audience.

The framework accommodates diverse stakeholder needs, from detailed operational updates to high-level strategic summaries. Strategy leads are expected to communicate effectively across all organizational levels, from departmental meetings to presentations before external groups. Mr. Bynum noted that several team members have already met with various departments to discuss specific strategies or the overall strategic plan, and this engagement will continue throughout the implementation period.

Strategy leads will collaborate closely with University Relations to ensure that progress on the strategic plan is prominently featured in the Chancellor’s annual report. This report will include verified, measurable outcomes; compelling narratives of progress and impact; visual representations of achievement; and community and stakeholder success stories.

Mr. Bynum then introduced the strategic plan dashboard, developed in collaboration with Ryan McDonald, Director of Institutional Research. The dashboard features key performance indicators, data visualization standards, and audience-appropriate metrics to track and communicate progress effectively. The dashboard will be accessible from the Chancellor's landing page on the university website, with links to the strategic plan and the interactive dashboard.

The dashboard organizes metrics by goal, with color-coded status indicators at a glance. Goals that exceed targets appear in green, those below target appear in red, those on target appear in dark blue, and those for which baselines are still being established are marked as to be determined. Mr. Bynum acknowledged that many metrics currently show TBD status, explaining that the first year of implementation is focused on establishing baseline data, and the dashboard will look substantially different by next year when a full year of information is available.

Walking through the dashboard, Mr. Bynum highlighted several key indicators. Enrollment growth, as Dr. Tucker reported, is above target in green, reflecting an 8% increase against a 5% annual growth target. Users can double-click any percentage to open a text box that provides additional context and background for that data point.

International enrollment growth, as discussed earlier in the meeting, is below the target established in the strategic plan. The goal is to increase international enrollment by 55% over the five-year period from the current baseline. Mr. Bynum reminded colleagues that this is a marathon, not a sprint, and that strategy leads should not feel pressured to achieve all goals in year one or even in the first six months.

Under Goal Two, the Center for Teaching and Learning is on target, with 35% faculty participation. This initiative, launched through the Title III grant, aims to achieve 50% faculty participation by the end of the strategic plan period.

Goal Three includes campus signage upgrades, which currently shows 0% progress. Vice Chancellor McPhearson is leading this strategy to replace and upgrade 100% of university signage by 2030. The initiative remains in the planning stage, with no installations completed to date.

Goal Four focuses on developing a unified stakeholder communication strategy. Mr. Bynum explained that this addresses a recurring question about how to determine which information should be communicated first to the Advisory Board, then to various constituent groups, and finally to the broader public. The goal is to create a decision tree to establish communication protocols based on the type and significance of the information being shared.

Goal Five includes several initiatives of particular interest. The Student Award Program, currently in development, will recognize students who excel academically and in service to UT Martin. The program is tentatively titled the Skyhawk Summit Scholar Award, reflecting Coach Pat Head Summitt's legacy and values, and is planned for implementation in fall 2027.

The Skyhawk Innovation Challenge, another initiative led by Director Alisha Melton, will establish an annual university-wide competition that solicits creative proposals to address regional problems. Modeled conceptually on the UT Grand Challenges program, this initiative is on track for launch in spring 2026, pending funding for implementation. Mr. Bynum noted that the dashboard enables strategy leads to share narrative updates on progress, even when quantitative goals have not yet been met.

Chairman Sparks asked about how historical data will be displayed, specifically, whether metrics would show year-over-year comparisons or cumulative progress from 2025 through the reporting period. Mr. Bynum explained that the approach varies by metric. Enrollment growth will likely always reflect the current year's percentage increase, as it is measured year over year. Other strategies clearly require tracking cumulative progress over the five-year period, while some initiatives, like the communication strategy, will simply transition to complete status once finished and remain green thereafter. The text boxes associated with each metric will provide context and guidance on interpreting specific data points.

Chairman Sparks inquired about responsibility for data input and maintenance. Mr. Bynum confirmed that Ryan McDonald and the Institutional Research team maintain the dashboard. Information flows through quarterly reports submitted by strategy leads, which are collected centrally and made available to the campus community (though not to external audiences). Mr. McDonald then works with strategy leads to update the dashboard accordingly.

Regarding update frequency, Chairman Sparks asked when he should review the dashboard to see meaningful changes. Mr. Bynum explained that quarterly reporting drives the update cycle for most metrics, though some metrics change only annually. Enrollment, for example, will show the same percentage throughout the year because it is measured from fall to fall. However, other metrics may show quarterly changes. Mr. Bynum suggested that September would likely be the optimal time for comprehensive updates, aligning with the fall enrollment report and providing a natural point for broader strategic plan communications. He anticipated that formal strategic plan updates would likely become a regular feature of Advisory Board meetings, similar to the standing enrollment report.

Hal Bynum observed that Jake Bynum had clearly retained his political communication skills. Chairman Sparks agreed, noting that the presentation was thorough and effective, and thanked Mr. Bynum for the comprehensive update.

VII. Comments by the Chancellor

Chancellor Freeman began by reflecting on the strategic plan and expressing great pride in the institution's achievements. He characterized the plan as bold, innovative, visionary, and forward-thinking, and expressed confidence that it will have an impact on the university over the next five years. The Chancellor emphasized a core philosophy: You will not accomplish what you do not measure.; The team has invested significant time in identifying specific, measurable goals for every strategy where quantification is possible, recognizing that measurement is essential to achieving meaningful outcomes.

The Chancellor acknowledged that the institution may not achieve every single strategy by the target dates, noting that the goals are intentionally designed as stretch objectives. He stated clearly that he would be only slightly disappointed if certain goals were not fully achieved, but genuinely upset if the institution did not make a full effort to achieve them. The expectation is maximum effort on every objective, recognizing that ambitious goals may exceed what is achievable within a given timeframe. The dashboard represents the institution's commitment to keeping the strategic plan alive and visible, ensuring it is not forgotten.

Chancellor Freeman returned to the topic of enrollment to ensure its significance was not understated. He characterized the 8% growth, achieved for the second consecutive year, as phenomenal for the campus. Leading the state in enrollment growth and achieving the second-highest enrollment in institutional history are truly significant accomplishments. The Chancellor expressed profound gratitude to the enrollment management team and to all faculty and staff across campus, emphasizing that achieving these results requires every person pushing in the same direction. The institution celebrated reaching the 14-day census milestone, but admissions staff are already working toward next year's goals. As the Chancellor noted, there is "no rest for the weary" as the institution continues pursuing its ambitious enrollment objectives.

The Chancellor then turned to the university's 125th-anniversary celebration. UT Martin traces its origins to the Hall-Moody Institute, established in 1900. Recognizing that institutions do not turn 125 every year, the university is planning significant commemorative events. Board members received invitations to the 125th anniversary ceremony and luncheon scheduled for October 10, 2025, during homecoming week. Most former chancellors are

expected to return to campus for the celebration, providing Chancellor Freeman with an opportunity to learn from their experiences and hear stories, both wonderful and challenging, from the institution's history.

Looking further ahead, the fall of 2026 will mark the anniversary of the first semester of classes in 1901, and the institution is planning a major celebration to commemorate this milestone. The Chancellor has advocated holding the event near Pacer Pond, though the athletic parking lot, which offers more shade, is also under consideration. He emphasized that a birthday deserves a birthday party, and the institution intends to celebrate accordingly.

Stefan Maupin interjected that while the Chancellor spoke of quizzing former chancellors about their experiences, he suspected they would be quizzing Chancellor Freeman about his remarkable success during his tenure. Chairman Sparks suggested the answer might be the outstanding Advisory Board, which Chancellor Freeman enthusiastically endorsed.

Chancellor Freeman concluded this portion of his remarks by discussing the Chancellor's Leadership Academy. He emphasized his deep commitment to investing in current faculty and staff. The inaugural class includes 13 members who held their first session approximately a week and a half before the meeting. The Chancellor expressed satisfaction with the launch of this program, which is designed to pull back the veil on institutional decision-making processes and provide transparency into how leadership navigates complex challenges.

Academy participants will engage meaningfully with the UTM senior leadership team and will have opportunities to meet members of the broader UT system leadership throughout the eight-month program. The curriculum includes executive coaching, representing a significant investment in professional development. The Chancellor explicitly framed the academy as succession planning, expressing his desire to ensure that, if he were to leave unexpectedly, multiple individuals would be prepared to step into the role and lead effectively. Investing in talented employees demonstrates that loyalty and dedication to the institution are valued and that there are meaningful opportunities for advancement.

Chairman Sparks requested updates on capital projects, specifically the College of Business and Global Affairs building, the residence hall, and the TEST Hub.

Chancellor Freeman addressed the College of Business and Global Affairs (CBGA) building first. The project is in the early programming phase, which involves nearly a year of planning before any physical construction or demolition can begin. The project team is currently meeting with faculty in the College of Business and Global Affairs to understand how they teach, which

classroom configurations best support their pedagogical approaches, and how learning environments should be designed. The Chancellor emphasized that this is a unique opportunity to envision not just today's classroom but tomorrow's learning environments, and the institution intends to get it right.

Following the programming phase, architects will develop designs; an RFP will be issued for construction; competitive bidding will occur; and construction will begin. The current building will be demolished, and faculty and staff will relocate to surge space in Johnson EPS during construction. The projected completion date is sometime in 2029. The Chancellor acknowledged that the timeline is lengthy, particularly when demolishing an existing structure and building on the same site, but emphasized that the careful planning process is essential to achieving the best possible outcome.

Regarding the TEST Hub, Chancellor Freeman reported that the project is undergoing value engineering. The project budget is approximately \$18.5 million, but construction bids came in at \$22 million, requiring adjustments to keep costs within available funding. The team is close to completing this process, after which construction can begin on the site near the campus recreation facility and Pacer Pond. Construction is expected to begin in spring 2026, with an estimated 18-month duration.

The Chancellor highlighted a unique aspect of the TEST Hub: to his knowledge, it is the only facility in the state that represents a partnership across all spectrums of higher education. TCAT McKenzie, Dyersburg State Community College, and UT Martin are partnering in the facility, with the community college and technical college having dedicated space within the building. This collaborative model represents an innovative approach to regional workforce development and educational access.

The new residence hall is also progressing, though construction bids exceeded the budget by approximately \$4.5 million. Value engineering is underway to bring costs within the available funding. Dr. Lewter is leading this project. The Chancellor noted that construction costs have increased significantly from the previous year, making it challenging to stay within the originally projected budgets. The new 400-bed residence hall will replace Browning Hall, which will be demolished after students vacate at the end of the spring 2026 semester. Construction is expected to take approximately 2 years, with a projected opening in fall 2028. The Chancellor emphasized that the institution is in a housing crunch and this project is critical to accommodating growing enrollment.

Dan Strasser asked about the status of the Administration Building renovation. Chancellor Freeman noted, with some humor, that he had been in that building for only about a week and a half when he began his position before relocating

during renovations. He looks forward to returning to the space, as having administrators dispersed across campus has made it more difficult to maintain regular contact with colleagues.

The renovation has taken longer than originally anticipated because the project was funded in two phases. Rather than completing the first phase, moving people back into an active construction site, and then beginning the second phase, the Chancellor decided to keep everyone out until the entire project was complete. This approach avoids disruption and ensures that when occupants return, the building will be fully finished. Completion is expected in late first quarter 2026, with phased move-in occurring through spring and summer as departments return in sequence, like dominoes.

Stefan Maupin expressed concern about the TEST Hub, noting that it is designed to be a regional education facility and that its costs exceed the appropriated budget. He asked whether the facility would still be able to achieve its intended purpose and maintain necessary longevity. Chancellor Freeman affirmed his confidence that the facility will meet its original objectives. The value engineering discussions involve finishes, furniture, and certain equipment, with consideration of moving certain items from below the line to above the line to cover building costs. If certain equipment purchases must be deferred, they can be addressed in future budget years or through contingency funds if construction costs ultimately come in below projection. Private fundraising efforts are already underway, with potential partners present at the groundbreaking ceremony. The Chancellor expressed hope that the facility will generate patents and serve as a center of innovation where students and faculty collaborate, potentially creating inventions that generate significant value.

Chairman Sparks suggested that organizations such as the Tennessee Farm Bureau and the Tennessee Soybean Board could be excellent partners for the facility. Stefan Maupin offered to provide the Chancellor with his board's contact information, and the Chancellor enthusiastically welcomed the opportunity. Mr. Maupin observed that the TEST Hub is precisely the type of facility that could attract private funding from various sources, which was why he raised the question to ensure the institution would not sacrifice long-term effectiveness for short-term budget constraints.

Regarding the 125th anniversary, Chairman Sparks emphasized its importance and encouraged board members to attend the October 10 event. He noted humorously that Bob Carroll might be the only person present who has been connected to the institution for all 125 years.

On a personal note, Chairman Sparks shared that his family had experienced a difficult quarter and expressed appreciation for the **university's outreach and**

support, as well as that of fellow board members, during this challenging time.

VIII. Closing Remarks

Dan Strasser noted that this was Darby Self's first meeting in attendance, as she had been in Paris during the previous meeting. He invited her to introduce herself to the board. Ms. Self, a sophomore studying Mass Media and Strategic Communication, expressed enthusiasm about serving on the Advisory Board. When Chairman Sparks asked about her hometown, she responded that she is from Somerville, Tennessee. She added that she was a dual-enrollment student who chose to continue her education at UT Martin, providing a clear example of the successful dual-enrollment pipeline Dr. Tucker described earlier in the meeting. Board members welcomed her warmly.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Sparks asked if there was any other business to come before the board. Hearing none, he noted that the meeting had concluded in record time and called for a motion to adjourn.

Dan Strasser moved to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Dan McDonough seconded the motion. Chairman Sparks called for a vote, and the motion carried unanimously with no opposition. The meeting was adjourned.