



# TUFS

## Tennessee University Faculty Senates

*Representing nearly 10,000 university faculty at ten state institutions of higher education.*

Phil Bredesen, Governor  
State Capitol  
Nashville, Tennessee  
37243-0001

September 30, 2009

Dear Governor Bredesen,

In April I wrote to you, asking that Tennessee University Faculty Senates (TUFS) be allowed input into the impending discussions of the statewide reorganization of higher education. On May 4, Deputy Governor Morgan responded on your behalf, saying, “Throughout this process, the input from all relevant interests will be sought and thoughtfully considered. Your input, and those you represent, will be critical to our success.”

Since May, the Presidents and other representatives of the TUFS faculty senates (the senates of all the UT and TBR universities) have been working to craft a response that is representative of faculty views across the state. After much electronic discussion over the summer, we met in Nashville on August 14-16 and drew up the attached Position Paper. Then during the following month and a half, we took this Position Paper back to our senates for their consideration. Five of the ten TBR/UT University Senates voted to approve the paper outright. These were Austin Peay State University, UT Chattanooga, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee State University and East Tennessee State University. Four (UT Knoxville, UT Health Science Center, UT Martin and Tennessee Tech) declined to approve it. The University of Memphis endorsed the objectives of the paper but did not endorse the recommendations, though it called for “careful consideration” of the latter. In sum, a majority of the TUFS senates have indicated that they want this paper to be considered as a contribution to the discussions that you are now conducting.

Because, however, the Position Paper has met with objections from some of the faculty senates, I have appended to it a document entitled *Dissenting Statements*. The statements this second document contains were prepared by the Presidents of the faculty senates of the four UT/TBR universities that endorsed no part of the TUFS Position Paper. They summarize the objections raised against the Position Paper by these faculty senates.

TUFS was created to ensure that thoughtful, carefully formulated university faculty concerns be made known to state officials, the media and the public. Our Position Paper and the Dissenting Statements represent our effort to do so on the issue of the statewide organization of higher education. We appreciate your willingness to consider our input.

If TUFS can be of any service to you regarding this issue, please do not hesitate to call on us.

Best wishes,



John Nolt  
President, Tennessee University Faculty Senates  
Past President, UT Knoxville Faculty Senate  
Professor  
Department of Philosophy  
801 McClung Tower  
University of Tennessee  
Knoxville, TN 37996-0480  
(865)-974-7218  
[nolt@utk.edu](mailto:nolt@utk.edu)

# Tennessee University Faculty Senates Position Paper on the Reorganization of Higher Education in Tennessee

## I. Background

Tennessee University Faculty Senates (TUFS), an association of the four-year state university Senates founded in April 2008, represents nearly 10,000 higher education faculty in Tennessee. It is an historic collaboration, involving faculty from the four campuses of the University of Tennessee system and the six universities of the Board of Regents system.

As the statewide reorganization of higher education became a topic of conversation in Nashville in 2009, TUFS sought to make a contribution. This potential reorganization was the central theme of TUFS' April 2009 retreat at Fall Creek Falls State Park. Two TUFS representatives, Ed Stevens (University of Memphis) and John Nolt (UTK) were appointed to the joint UT/TBR Task Force on Higher Education in the spring of 2009.

The purpose of this position paper is to lay out TUFS' recommendations for reorganization.

## II. General Principles Endorsed by TUFS

As representatives of the faculty of Tennessee's public four-year institutions, TUFS' central purpose is to promote the richest and best possible education for Tennessee students and to provide for Tennessee's faculty the means to deliver that education effectively. Much can be accomplished toward these goals by the reorganization of the state's higher education administration, but only if all of us put aside, to the extent possible, traditional arrangements, political considerations, wrangling over resources, and regional or institutional loyalties.

TUFS also holds that higher education should be frugal with Tennessee's scarce fiscal resources. We seek to avoid waste and unnecessary expense in our teaching, scholarship, creative activity, research and service, and expect a Tennessee higher education administration that is responsive, rational, lean and efficient.

## III. Objectives Endorsed by TUFS

TUFS holds that reorganization of higher education should achieve the following objectives:

1. **More rational and efficient organization.** The TBR system, for example, includes two-year community and technical colleges, a foreign language institute and six universities, five of which have doctoral programs. Those on the ground in the TBR system are frequently frustrated by "one-size-fits-all" directives from the TBR administration. A more rational organization might help avoid this.
2. **Faculty and student collaboration and exchange.** The breadth and depth of talent and expertise available in the TBR and UT systems is enormous, but institutional barriers prevent beneficial collaboration and exchange. Graduate students and faculty from each institution would benefit greatly from the ability to move between one campus and the other, but this would be extraordinarily difficult under current arrangements. Much more along these lines could be accomplished to the benefit of faculty and students if it were facilitated by a common administration.
3. **Research informs the education process.** Beginning in the undergraduate years, research informs the teaching and learning process. At both the undergraduate and graduate levels, education and research activities of each university should fulfill its mission statement and facilitate accreditations. Regional access to graduate programs is imperative for an educated citizenry and workforce, and should be maintained.
4. **Seamless system-wide access to library resources for students and faculty.** At present, each university negotiates separate licensing agreements and contracts for library databases and other resources for their library users. This process duplicates efforts across institutions, involving libraries, legal affairs, and purchasing departments on our campuses. Most importantly, it overlooks consortial buying power, which allows greater access to library resources.
5. **Better geographical distribution of programs.** Academic programs have grown up around the state for reasons that are often historical or political. The students of Tennessee will be best served by a distribution designed to deliver a rich array of educational services where they are needed. TUFS supports the reinforcement of programs that deliver valuable services well but are not now adequately supported and the elimination of unnecessary duplication within service areas but also the development of new programs where needed. These things require effective statewide administration.
6. **Flattening administration.** Higher education in Tennessee is administered at too many distinct levels, which are often too far removed from the classroom to appreciate the effects of their decisions on campus administrators, faculty and students. In addition to campus administrations, which themselves can be extremely complex, there are the two systems and their boards of Trustees, and THEC.

#### **IV. Recommendations**

In order to flatten administrative systems, better serve students, reduce costs and advance the other objectives of reorganizing higher education in Tennessee, TUFSS recommends that:

1. Whatever administrative structure emerges from the reorganization ensures the ability of faculty and students (both graduate and undergraduate) to move easily without institutional barriers among the various campuses. It should be easy for students to take classes at more than one campus while respecting prerequisites. There should also be a visiting faculty consortium that allows faculty to work at other state campuses. Achieving these goals will require coordination of academic calendars.
2. With respect to libraries, there should be a statewide catalog, centralized vendor contract negotiation, and centralized purchase of library resources, which facilitate broad access.
3. There should be a statewide common general education core curriculum.
4. Institutions should have interconnected IT systems.
5. It should be easy to develop joint academic programs that use resources from multiple state institutions.
6. Application for undergraduate admission to all state institutions should be centralized, leaving recruitment and acceptance to individual campuses.
7. Centralization of the following functions should also be considered:
  - Benefits -insurance, medical, retirement, etc.
  - Human resources policies and procedures
  - Purchasing
  - Research administration.
  -
8. As a further cost-saving measure, the proportion of campus budgets used for administration should be regularly examined.
9. There are several good ways to organize the governance of higher education in Tennessee. However, we suggest establishing a separate system for the community colleges and technical schools, and merging the Tennessee Board of Regents universities with The University of Tennessee system. The administration of the resulting university system should be located in Nashville. We recommend that each campus in the new system have a local advisory board that is unpaid, self-perpetuating, and dedicated to the interests of its local university. University faculty senates should be involved in all stages of the development of this new system.

## **Dissenting Statements**

*The following statements were prepared by the Presidents of the faculty senates of the four UT/TBR universities that endorsed no part of the TUFS Position Paper. They summarize the objections raised against the Position Paper by the faculty senates of these universities.*

### **Tennessee Tech**

After careful study, the Faculty Senate of Tennessee Technological University (TTU) voted 26 to 1 against endorsement of the TUFS Position Paper. The TTU Senate agrees with the need to make the state-level governance of Tennessee higher education much more cost efficient. The position paper failed, however, to make an adequate case as to why the proposed UT/TBR merger would be the best way to accomplish that. The TTU Senate also strongly objects to open-ended statements that pave the way for cutting programs and erasing the unique identity of each campus through homogenization and assimilation. Overall, the TTU Faculty Senate endorses the evaluation of options that seek to preserve the academic quality and distinctive role of each university, while reducing the cost of administrative oversight.

### **UT Knoxville**

The UT Knoxville Faculty Senate voted NOT to endorse the Tennessee University Faculty Senates Position Paper on the reorganization of higher education in Tennessee by a vote of 43 AGAINST the endorsement, 9 FOR. During discussion of the TUFS paper, several objections were raised. These focused primarily on the recommendations of the paper rather than the objectives. As consequences and costs of the recommendations had not been thoroughly investigated, several of them were considered to be premature. These included interconnection of IT systems, centralization of library services, centralization of research administration and merging of the TBR and UT systems. There was also objection to one of the TUFS paper's objectives, namely, regional access to graduate programs. The specific objection relates to the need to provide high-quality programs. While it may be possible to provide some programs in a variety of locations across the state, it is not likely that the State can afford this approach for the more expensive programs, such as medicine and engineering. If the state were to adopt the "regional access" guideline in a way that dilutes the quality of its best programs, our ability to compete with our neighboring states for the best students would be jeopardized. The highest six-year graduation rate in the state is at UTK, and that is far below the rates in Georgia and North Carolina. Having programs of high quality, rather than proliferation of mediocre programs, is Tennessee's best chance for attracting the best students. To reorganize in a way that ignores this will not serve the State well in the long run.

### **UT Martin**

The UT Martin Faculty Senate voted NOT to endorse the Tennessee University Faculty Senates Position Paper on the reorganization of higher education in Tennessee by a vote of 52 AGAINST the endorsement, 0 FOR, and 2 absent. Furthermore, the Faculty Senate voted to adopt the following statement:

The Faculty Senate at the University of Tennessee at Martin strongly objects to the Tennessee University Faculty Senates (TUFS) Position Paper. Any reorganization of the higher education system in Tennessee must be done for the benefit of the students and citizens of Tennessee and must take into account the effectiveness of the individual institutions. The quality of performance of an institution can be measured using graduation rates, retention rates, and alumni satisfaction surveys. If the goal of a reorganization proposal is to save money, then the savings should be significant and quantifiable; yet the TUFS Position Paper fails to provide a single metric or piece of data to support the proposal. The TUFS Position Paper also seeks a one-size-fits-all solution by asking for unified schedules, curriculum core, and interchangeable faculty, but Tennesseans deserve a strong, effective, and diverse collection of institutions. Finally, TUFS proposes flattening administration by creating layers of bureaucracy. We only support changes which will improve the education of our students, the universities' support of our communities, and the most effective uses of state revenue.

## **UT Health Science Center**

The Faculty Senate Executive Committee of the University of Tennessee Health Science Center Faculty Senate met on September 3, 2009 to review, discuss and vote on endorsement of the TUFs position paper on Reorganization of Higher Education in Tennessee. The FSEC voted not to endorse the TUFs position paper — 2 votes in favor and 7 votes opposed. The paper was then sent to each senator for review. On Tuesday, September 8, in the Faculty Senate meeting, the reasons for the FSEC vote not to endorse the position paper were stated and discussed. There was no floor motion from any senator to reconsider or to bring the paper to a further vote for endorsement by the full Senate.

The FSEC, representing the UTHSC Faculty Senate, based its vote not to endorse the TUFs position paper primarily on the following points.

### Objectives

It is accepted that more efficient administration would help higher education, but from the UTHSC perspective, a merger to one state administration for all universities is not a logically derived or proven conclusion. There are equally valid arguments for separate state university systems that serve different purposes and come in different flavors. In fact, the first objective of the paper speaks to the frustration of a “one-size-fits-all” directive from a single administration that is over distinctly different educational institutions. One could easily see this same complaint if there were one administration over all the Tennessee Universities.

The objective regarding faculty and student collaboration and exchange sounds fine. Collaborations and exchange are beneficial and they do happen between Tennessee Universities within the present structure. Might this be facilitated by a common administration? Maybe. But the benefit of graduate students and faculty moving between one campus and the other is not defined and thus unsupportable. What exactly does “move between” mean? Are we talking about a summer month in a colleague’s lab, or a two-year change in affiliation and appointment? One could envision enormous difficulties in implementing such a policy or process.

### Recommendations

Many of the recommendations in the paper are actually the reverse of the way we sense the UT system (and the State) moving. Dr. Simek in his visit to UTHSC was talking of more autonomy for the UT campuses, not increased centralization of the System.

1. This idea of students and faculty “moving” between campuses is very ill defined and seems fraught with difficulties, if not downright impossibilities. From the UTHSC perspective, coordination of academic calendars would be impossible, and we doubt it could be achieved even at the undergraduate level.

2. System-wide access to library resources is a reasonable and beneficial goal. However, centralized purchasing of resources can again move to a one-size-fits-all theme that is not beneficial to the specialized needs of a health science center library.

7. Again, because of the distinct nature and mission of the Tennessee Universities, and specifically the unique aspects of professional education at a health science center, centralization of human resources, purchasing and particularly research administration are viewed as detrimental to the achievement of individual university goals and needs.

8. This recommendation is true not only for administration, but also for education, research, campus security, capital maintenance, etc. Each aspect of a university’s function should be examined regularly for further cost-saving measures.

9. The UTHSC Senate cannot support the recommendation of a merging of TBR and UT systems without evidence that having a single administration would in fact bring about increased efficiencies and at the same time preserve and promote the distinct character, mission and stature of the separate Tennessee Universities.

The bottom line is that the basic idea of more efficiency is something that all agree with, but this paper seems overreaching and impractically (both logistically and politically) in its more specific objectives and recommendation.