

Austin Peay State University
Faculty Senate
Meeting of Thursday, October 23, 2025
Morgan University Center, 307 | 3:00 p.m.
Agenda

Call to Order: Senate President Brandon Di Paolo Harrison

Senate President Di Paolo Harrison distributed a sign-in sheet for guests and senators.

Recognition of Guests: Ozzie Di Paolo Harrison, Christina Chester-Fangman, Vladimir Trapara, Kayla Earls, Kelly Pitts, Lisa Sullivan, Mitch Cordova, Ginna Holleman, Valerie Leake, Mike Licari, Mickey Wadia, and LeAnn Wills

Absent Senators: Bobette Bouton, Philip Elike, Brandi Fuglsby, Charles Gonzalez, Manisha Gupte, Matt Hampton, Kristen Hershey, Kathy Heuston, John Nicholson, Justin Oelgoetz, Mahesh Pallikonda, Perry Scanlan, Donna Short, and Heather Tillewein [**Absent Senators will not have their absence counted against them due to the scheduling issue regarding the meeting on October 16th.**]

Approval of Today's Agenda: Motion made, seconded, and passed by majority vote

Approval of Senate Minutes:

1. **9/18/2025 Meeting Minutes:** Motion made, seconded, and passed by majority vote
2. **9/25/2025 Meeting Minutes:** Motion made, seconded, and passed by majority vote

Remarks:

1. President Mike Licari (5 minutes)

President Licari provided university-wide updates. He discussed the ongoing federal government shutdown and its impact on students receiving federal tuition assistance, particularly active-duty soldiers. Over 400 such students were allowed to remain enrolled despite funding interruptions to keep them on track academically and to prevent adverse effects on state funding calculations. President Licari also noted that the ROTC program could soon face related challenges. He shared information from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) about its upcoming strategic plan, which focuses on three pillars—Aligned, Achievable, and Agile—to ensure higher education meets workforce needs, remains accessible, and adapts to emerging technologies. President Licari also announced plans to hold campus-wide discussions and create a working group on freedom of expression and civil discourse, emphasizing the need for a shared statement of institutional values and proactive engagement rather than waiting for state-level initiatives.

During the discussion, senators raised questions about faculty protections, policy enforcement, and accountability for administrative actions. President Licari acknowledged past policy lapses, affirmed that policies remain in effect, and assured that violations carry legal consequences, though often outside the university system. Faculty members expressed concerns about trust, the uneven enforcement of policies, and the need to implement systemic safeguards beyond

administrative assurances. President Licari reaffirmed his commitment to transparency and dialogue, noting that campus conversations on freedom of expression, institutional values, and the next strategic plan will begin soon. He plans to engage faculty, staff, and students in these discussions. Finally, a senator emphasized the importance of aligning departmental accreditation requirements with the university's strategic planning timeline. President Licari agreed, stressing that broad, early participation in planning would help ensure alignment across all academic programs.

2. Provost Mitch Cordova (5 minutes)

Provost Cordova presented several major updates in academics and technology. He announced plans to elevate the current Honors Program to an Honors College, noting strong support from university leadership, including the deans, as well as Dr. Winters and Dr. Griffy, who are developing the framework for this transition. The goal is to attract higher-quality students and increase donor interest.

Provost Cordova outlined multiple updates within the university's academic technology infrastructure:

- *CourseDog* Implementation: The new platform for classroom and event scheduling became fully operational on October 1. It centralizes space management and provides analytics for classroom utilization. Additional components include a curriculum management platform (replacing paper-based processes, targeted for completion by June 1) and a new academic catalog, which will offer a searchable, mobile-friendly interface and improved scheduling visibility.
- *DegreeWorks* Upgrade: The system will be enhanced with a Smart Plan feature that enables advisors and students to model "what-if" scenarios for major or minor changes and predict time-to-degree adjustments. Implementation begins in the spring, with full use expected by fall 2026 advising.

Provost Cordova announced plans to reimagine the general education core, emphasizing that it is not being replaced but modernized. The redesign will focus on critical thinking and leadership, potentially resulting in digital badges students can display on transcripts or LinkedIn. The revision aims to promote innovation, active learning, and improved assessment methods. Efforts are underway to identify and support at-risk students based on social engagement and academic performance. Data analysis is being used to target first-year students who are less involved on campus, with follow-up by residence life staff and instructors. A student progress report launched on October 17 has already received 830 faculty submissions, identifying 30% of respondents' students as at risk. Case management teams are now addressing these cases to improve retention. The Provost also discussed plans to use D2L for tracking student attendance data in real time to enable proactive interventions.

Following the Provost's report, faculty members voiced concerns about the usability of new systems such as APNavigate, GovsSuite, and CourseDog, citing excessive logins, inefficiency, and outdated interfaces. One faculty member expressed frustration with simultaneous rollouts of multiple platforms, which have complicated advising and student registration. Provost Cordova acknowledged these issues, encouraged continued feedback, and pledged to address workflow

inefficiencies and reduce bureaucratic barriers. Provost Cordova asked that faculty send their input regarding the use of D2L to track attendance or issues with the newly implemented software to him via email.

3. Ginna Holleman, Chief of Strategic Communication (5 minutes)

Ginna Holleman, Chief of Strategic Communication, introduced herself and outlined her background, role, and vision for the university's communications strategy. She described her lifelong connection to higher education, noting that both her parents were professors, her mother served as Dean of the College of Business at Austin Peay, and she and her daughter are both alumni. Her professional experience includes serving as a corporate partner with the university, which has given her a multifaceted understanding of its community and impact.

Ms. Holloman explained that her role as Chief of Strategic Communication—a newly created position—focuses on coordinating all university communications to ensure a unified, consistent, and strategic voice. She emphasized collaboration and described her mission as helping all parts of the university “amplify” their collective story rather than dilute it. She illustrated this with a metaphor of flashlights shining in one direction to create a brighter, unified light. She announced the formation of a new Strategic Communication Council, called “The Loop,” designed to keep the campus community informed and connected. The council will include representatives from each college and division, as well as faculty, staff, and students. Its goal is to foster continuous, transparent communication and collaboration across the university.

During the question period, faculty members raised concerns about the university's handling of recent communications regarding the suspension and potential termination of a tenured professor, Darren Michael. One senator cited a Clarksville Now article in which the university's statement appeared before faculty were informed, expressing frustration that faculty learned of the action through the media. Chief Holloman responded that the timing and content of that communication were directed by legal counsel, not her personal preference, and that she values transparency but was limited by legal constraints. She acknowledged the process was not ideal and committed to improving internal communication in the future. Another senator criticized the university's weeklong silence following the incident, calling it inconsistent with public relations best practices and damaging to trust. Holloman agreed that the situation had been mishandled and reiterated that it was not her chosen approach, but rather a legal directive. She acknowledged the need for better wording in the university's official statement and agreed that faculty feedback was essential to improving future communication.

In response to a final question, Ms. Holloman clarified that she oversees public relations, marketing, and the print shop, reporting directly to the president's office—a structure designed to align communications more closely with university leadership.

4. Brandon Di Paolo Harrison, IRB Chair and Kelly Pitts, Assistant Director, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (10 minutes)

Senate President Di Paolo Harrison, joined by Kelly Pitts, Assistant Director of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, provided an update on Institutional Review Board (IRB) activities. Senate President Harrison shared data from the previous year's report, noting that 82 IRB applications were submitted in the last calendar year—a strong number for the campus size. Applications were distributed across colleges, with the College of Behavioral and Health Science

slightly leading the College of Education. The IRB also supported research conducted by administrative divisions. As of this year, the IRB has already accepted its 81st application, putting it on track to exceed last year's total by approximately 10%. There has been a noticeable increase in research involving vulnerable populations, signaling a shift in the types of human subject research being conducted. Senate President Harrison emphasized that this growth reflects broader campus expansion and research activity.

A key point of the update was the call for new members to serve on the IRB committee. Senate President Harrison encouraged faculty who are knowledgeable and interested to reach out, assuring them that the workload is manageable and responsibilities are shared among members. Committee membership terms are typically three years, with the option to continue with approval or resign if necessary. The IRB strives for diversity and regulatory compliance, requiring representation from both scientific and non-scientific members, as well as a community member unaffiliated with the university. The committee also aims for balanced representation across all colleges to ensure well-informed review processes. Senate President Harrison concluded by stating that updated 2025 numbers will be shared with both Academic Affairs and the Faculty Senate.

Assistant Director Pitts from the Grants Office provided an overview of updates to grant submission procedures and new forms being implemented. She began by reviewing the existing Grant Routing Form, which ensures compliance and proper notification before submitting a grant application—especially when faculty request release time or additional compensation. This form routes through the appropriate departmental channels to maintain communication and oversight. She noted significant changes in the federal funding landscape this year, explaining that as federal opportunities have become less available, their grant vendor—the Grants Resource Center—has expanded its focus to include more foundation grant opportunities. These new opportunities present funding sources previously unavailable to the university.

To manage these foundation-specific grants properly, she worked with Erin Morton, Senior Director of Development in the Philanthropy Office, to create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the university foundation and the Grants Office. This agreement ensures compliance when applying for grants that require a 501(c)(3) status. She clarified that the university foundation cannot process payroll, so any grant including salary, graduate assistant, or student worker pay will have those funds managed through the university's Oracle system instead. A new form documents this process to ensure proper compliance and accounting. She concluded by noting that the new fillable form will soon be available on the grants website, developed in coordination with Jacob Colwell, and invited questions from attendees.

5. Senate President Brandon Di Paolo Harrison

- a. Student Success Taskforce:** Senate President Di Paolo Harrison emphasized the importance of faculty input on the Student Success Task Force. Members were encouraged to share ideas or concerns—especially those specific to their disciplines—so these could be brought before the task force. The representative plans to begin providing updates on task force activities starting in November, but noted that the Provost will give the first report.
- b. SVP of Faculty Affairs Search Update:** Next, he announced that the search for the

Senior Vice President of Faculty Affairs is underway. Faculty were urged to attend upcoming open forums and encourage their colleagues to do the same, as the feedback gathered in those sessions directly informs the search committee's decisions.

Such Other Matters

Senate President Di Paolo Harrison addressed the interim Faculty Senate elections, noting that nominations close at 4:30 p.m. the following day. Despite eight available seats, only three nominations had been received—two from the College of STEM and one from the College of Arts and Letters. The latter college, in particular, has had poor participation for two years, leaving 11 seats unfilled.

A discussion followed about faculty disengagement. One senator expressed that some faculty are refusing to participate as a form of protest. Senate President Di Paolo Harrison encouraged outreach and personal engagement, stressing that participating in Senate is a more effective way to create change than abstaining, highlighting the need for diverse voices, collegial debate, and full representation across all colleges.

Adjournment: 4:10 p.m.

Motion made, seconded, and passed by majority vote