

# Austin Peay State University

## Faculty Senate

### Regular Meeting Minutes

February 26, 2026 | 3:00 p.m.

Morgan University Center, Room 307

---

#### 1. Call to Order

The regular meeting of the Faculty Senate was called to order at 3:00 p.m. by Faculty Senate President Dr. Brandon Di Paolo Harrison, presiding.

#### 2. Roll Call

Roll was called by Vice President/President-Elect and Secretary Pro-Tem Darren Michael. A quorum was established.

Absentees: Ronnel Berry, Leslie Binford, Charles Gonzalez, Kristen Hershey, Jessica Morris, Kristen Sienkiewicz, Lori Smith

#### 3. Recognition of Guests

The following guests were recognized:

President Mike Licari; Provost Mitch Cordova; Carol Clark, Chief of Staff and Secretary to the Board of Trustees; Dannelle Whiteside, Vice President for Legal Affairs; Lisa Sullivan, Interim Senior Vice Provost and Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs; Ozzie Di Paolo Harrison, Faculty Senate Past President (ex officio); Nancy Gibson, Faculty Senate Board of Trustees Rep (Ex officio); Christina Chester-Fangman, Parliamentarian (ex officio); Brad Fox; Adam Atwood; Rod Mills; Stephanie Bandel; Paula White; Cate LiaBraaten; and Florian Gargaillo.

#### 4. Approval of Agenda

Senator Bill Rayburn moved to approve the agenda as presented.

The motion was seconded.

The motion carried by voice vote.

#### 5. Approval of Minutes

Senator Bill Rayburn moved to approve the minutes of the January 22, 2026 meeting.

The motion was seconded.

The motion carried by voice vote.

---

## Remarks

### 6. Report of the President of the University – President Mike Licari

President Licari reported on the Governor’s proposed state budget and its impact on higher education funding. The proposed budget does not fully fund the state higher education funding formula and includes funding for approximately a 1.5% salary increase.

President Licari and other university leaders have presented before legislative committees to advocate for full funding of the formula, which would require approximately \$75 million statewide. It was noted that full funding could allow the Tennessee Higher Education Commission to recommend capping tuition increases at approximately 2.5%, whereas under current funding levels institutions may need to consider increases as high as 6.5%.

President Licari indicated that advocacy efforts are ongoing and that discussions with legislators continue.

A question was raised regarding pending legislation (SB 1838 and HB 2581) and actions taken by the university. President Licari stated that the university continues to engage in direct conversations with legislators but does not typically discuss legislative strategy publicly.

---

### 7. Report of the Provost – Provost Mitch Cordova

Provost Cordova reported on the results of his campus-wide listening tour, conducted beginning in September and continuing through the academic year. Findings were organized around three themes: **Points of Pride, Pain Points, and Possibilities** across the five academic colleges.

Common themes across colleges included:

- **Points of Pride**
  - Strong student engagement and high-impact learning experiences
  - Career readiness and graduate success
  - Faculty scholarship and creative productivity
  - Interdisciplinary collaboration
  - Community and regional engagement
- **Pain Points**
  - Staffing shortages and workload strain
  - Compensation and retention concerns

- Space and facility constraints
- Technology and systems inefficiencies
- Enrollment and student preparedness challenges
- Concerns regarding academic freedom and policy environment
- **Possibilities**
  - Strategic interdisciplinary growth
  - Expanded industry partnerships
  - Strengthened K–12 and community partnerships
  - Expanded online and alternative program delivery
  - Enhanced student support infrastructure
  - Greater utilization of physical and digital resources

Provost Cordova indicated that these findings will inform development of the university's upcoming strategic plan and academic master plan.

Discussion was deferred due to time constraints.

## **8. Legal Clarification – Dannelle Whiteside, Vice President for Legal Affairs**

Vice President Whiteside provided legal clarification regarding:

- The status of tenure-related bills and potential implications
- Provisions allowing civil liability for disinviting speakers
- Institutional neutrality requirements
- Proposed changes to faculty discipline procedures that would remove the requirement for a faculty hearing recommendation prior to presidential action

She noted constitutional concerns regarding certain provisions and indicated that the university continues to monitor developments closely.

Questions were raised regarding:

- Contractual implications of tenure elimination
- Due process protections
- Faculty consultation requirements
- Free speech and protest provisions
- Potential impacts on academic freedom

## **9. Legislative Update –Dr. Carol Clark, Chief of Staff**

Dr. Clark provided an update on pending legislation affecting higher education, including:

- SB 1838 / HB 2581 (tenure-related legislation)
- SB 2194 (faculty discipline and institutional neutrality provisions)
- SB 1741 (free expression provisions)
- Additional bills concerning institutional governance and employment

Ms. Clark explained the legislative process, including committee structure and timelines, noting that several bills were pending committee hearings and that legislative session deadlines were approaching.

She emphasized that the university engages legislators through direct, private conversations focused on education and unintended consequences of proposed legislation. She stated that the university does not typically issue public statements on pending legislation but remains engaged in advocacy efforts.

---

## **Faculty Senate Business**

### **10. Senate Response to Pending Legislation**

Senate President Di Paolo Harrison reported that the Executive Committee is working to:

- Develop a Faculty Senate statement addressing pending legislation
- Coordinate with community partners regarding potential impacts
- Identify a Faculty Senate legislative liaison to monitor developments
- Improve communication to faculty regarding legislative matters

Discussion included concerns regarding transparency, institutional communication, trust, and shared governance.

---

## **11. Reports**

### **a. Dr. Donna Short – Ad Hoc Committee on Office Hours**

Dr. Short requested her report be tabled for the next Senate meeting due to time constraints.

---

## **12. Announcements**

- The Faculty Senate 50th Anniversary Celebration will be held April 10, 2026. Senators were encouraged to RSVP.
  - Faculty Senate elections close February 27, 2026 at 4:30 p.m.
  - Nominations for next year's Executive Committee will be forthcoming.
- 

## **13. Adjournment**

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded.  
The motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 4:38 p.m.

---

Respectfully submitted,

Darren Michael  
Recording Secretary  
Faculty Senate