



**Fall Faculty Meeting
Friday, Aug. 23, 2013
10 a.m., Tucker Theatre**

Dr. Sidney A. McPhee, President

Good morning.

I am delighted to welcome each of you to our annual fall faculty meeting as we begin the new academic year.

It is with great pleasure to be among the first to welcome back returning faculty and staff - and extend warm greetings to our newest employees.

Today in my remarks I would like to accomplish 3 goals:

First, I would like to highlight a few university achievements from this past year

Next, I would like to comment on some initiatives related to improving student academic success on our campus and outline some future plans that will ultimately lead to improved student success resulting in higher degree completion rates.

And finally, I would like to reflect on some of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in the coming year.

But first...let me take a few moments to recognize some individuals

- **who are extremely important to this institution;**
- ***who are committed to our mission...***
- **and are invaluable to me in working to ensure the successful management and operation of this university.**

I'll begin by introducing my executive team, a group of outstanding individuals who serve as my key advisors and are involved in much of the overall decision-making on our campus.

Please hold your applause until each group is recognized.

- Dr. Brad Bartel, University Provost;
- Mr. John Cothorn, Senior Vice President;
- Mr. Joe Bales, Vice President for University Advancement;
- Dr. Deb Sells, Vice President for Student Affairs and Vice Provost for Enrollment and Academic Services;
- Mr. Bruce Petryshak, Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer;
- Our newest Vice President, Mr. Andrew Oppmann, Marketing and Communications;
- And Mrs. Kimberly Edgar, Executive Assistant to the President.

These individuals are doing an outstanding job on behalf of our university.

Please join me in expressing appreciation to this dedicated team of campus leaders.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize other members of the President's Cabinet.

Before I ask the entire group to stand, I would like to give special recognition to three individuals who have been added to our cabinet membership since last year:

- **Professor Scott Boyd**, Faculty Senate President for 2013-14 and Director of Theater and Professor of Scenic Design and Technology.
- **And James Lee**, Student Government Association president for 2013-14.
- **And Richard Jackson**, Special Assistant to the President for Institutional Equity and Compliance.

Now, will all of the members of the President's Cabinet please stand and be recognized?

Please join me in thanking these individuals for their service and leadership.

We also have some other very special guests with us that I would like to acknowledge.

From the Tennessee General Assembly:

- **State Sen. Bill Ketron, 13th District**
- **State Sen. Jim Tracy, 16th District**
- **State Rep. Mike Sparks, 49th District**
- **State Rep. Rick Womick, 34th District**
- **and State Rep. Dawn White, 37th District.**

From our local leadership:

- **Murfreesboro Mayor Tommy Bragg**
- **and Rutherford County Mayor Ernest Burgess.**

Also with us is **Mr. Bill Mooningham**, President of the MTSU Foundation Board of Trustees and **Kathy Jones**, Vice President.

Will you join me in welcoming our special guests and thanking them for being here today?

Now, this past year we have witnessed amazing accomplishments and achievements by our faculty and staff, which continue to **bolster** our standing as a top-tier comprehensive public university and **enhanced** our reputation across the **nation** and around the **world**.

As a university:

- We continue to embrace our commitment to student success and aggressively pursue the State's goal to provide more college graduates for Tennessee's workforce;
- And we also have been and continue to be good stewards of the university's limited resources in these challenging financial times.

I would like to highlight some of the accomplishments and milestones we have achieved this past year.

First, the Chronicle of Higher Education named MTSU a **top producer of Fulbright scholars** for 2012–13.

- With this recognition we joined academic powerhouses like Duke, Stanford, and Princeton.
- And I might add - just 108 colleges in the nation were recognized, and no other college or university in Tennessee was listed.

The Princeton Review selected us as one of the “**Best in the Southeast**” on its latest ranking of the nation’s top colleges.

- Editors of the annual list, which recognized 138 institutions in the 12-state southeast region, called MTSU “**a growing school on the rise**” and a place where “**you get a quality education and you aren’t in crippling debt afterward.**”

At a time when lawmakers are stressing retention and graduation in higher education in Tennessee, MTSU’s May commencement **witnessed our largest graduating class ever.**

Now, regarding finances, we announced earlier this week that **our Centennial Campaign** has exceeded the \$70 million mark in pledges and gifts.

- **Our initial campaign goal was \$60 million.**
- **Currently we are at 85 percent of our new goal: \$80 million.**
- This **remarkable achievement** is a testament to the leadership of:
 - **Joe Bales**, our Vice President for University Advancement and his team;
 - and our campaign chair, **Pam Wright** and vice-chair **Don Witherspoon**, as well as our many generous donors.

And as part of the campaign, in April of this year, the university also received a significant gift from the estate of the late **James Buchanan**, MTSU alumnus, namesake of our

Buchanan Fellowships and the winner of the **1986 Nobel Prize in economics**.

The gift included \$2.5 million to our Honors College, the largest gift ever given to that college as part of his estate.

His bequest will help establish a lecture series focused on applying Buchanan's ideas to today's economic issues and extending the fellowships in his name.

And his Nobel medal will be **on permanent loan** to the university for display.

This past year we developed several **new academic degree programs** that meet the needs of this region and state:

- The College of Education has a new **doctoral program in Assessment, Learning, and School Improvement**.
- The College of Business and the University College are partnering on a **joint M.S. in Management**.

- The Concrete Industry Management department and the College of Business collaborated in the development of a new Executive MBA with a concentration in Concrete Industry Management, which began in the fall of 2012.
- And the College of Basic and Applied Sciences has created a B.S. in Mechatronic Engineering, a degree **program that is a unique partnership with Nissan** and our sister TBR school, Motlow College.

And in area of academic appointments:

- We hired **two outstanding academic deans**
 - Ken Paulson in Mass Communication
 - and David Urban in Business;
- And we named **several new department chairs and hired more than 50 tenure-track faculty members.**

This past year our Athletics program enjoyed remarkable success, **starting with the historic announcement of our move to Conference USA on July 1.**

During the spring 2013 semester:

- 10 of 17 teams had a semester team grade point average of **3.0 or higher**;
- 80 student athletes made the Dean's List (3.5+ GPA), and **26 had a perfect 4.0**.
- Overall, 155 of 299 student-athletes, **or 49 percent**, had a 3.0 or higher.
- Women's cross country had the **highest team GPA** with a 3.80.
- And Men's golf had the **highest men's team grade point average** with a 3.35.

Finally, a pair of our athletic teams earned national **Public Recognition Awards by the NCAA** in June.

- Blue Raider men's golf and men's cross-country received recognition based on their most recent multi-year Academic Progress Rates.

- It marks the third year in a row men's golf has earned the honor.
- These awards are given each year to teams scoring in the **top 10 percent nationwide in each sport with their APRs.**

We ended our 13 years in the Sun Belt Conference on a high note, winning its All-Sports Trophy, the Vic Bubas Cup:

- MTSU won this award nine times, including the last five years in a row.
- And no school has won the award more times since the Blue Raiders joined the league in 2000–01.

I would like Athletics Director Chris Massaro, along with our coaches, administrators and athletes here today, to stand and be recognized for their wonderful accomplishments.

Now, I will conclude last year's highlights with an update on campus facilities...

In April, we acquired the **17-acre Middle Tennessee Medical Center property near campus**, which includes:

- The 115,000-square-foot Bell Street Building, WHICH WILL BE USED FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES;
- A 143,000-square-foot parking garage;
- And a large green-space area that was the site of the old main hospital building.

And a few other facilities updates....

- We opened our new \$65 million, 211,000-square-foot **Student Union Building** in September.
- We are about to finish our **new “MT One-Stop” across from the Student Union**, which will make our student service operations even more efficient and effective.

- And, perhaps even more exciting to our students, we opened **two new parking garages this month**, which adds almost 1,000 spaces to the campus core.
- AND CERTAINLY LAST BUT NOT LEAST...our **new science building** is right on schedule and we plan to open in the spring of 2015.

Now, as we embark upon this new academic year, we are well positioned to solidify our position as **Tennessee's Best comprehensive university.**

But we cannot rest upon our past successes -- for many challenges lie ahead.

With an open mind and a positive approach, **these challenges become opportunities** for:

- transformation,
- innovation,
- and **even greater success!**

As you well know, the state's funding formula for universities has changed: ***With the passage of the Complete College Tennessee Act two years ago, our state appropriation is now based on retention and graduation rates, not enrollment.***

These changes have prompted MTSU, as well as all of the state's public institutions of higher education, to rethink our academic institutional strategies and administrative day-to-day operations.

Those of you in attendance last year may recall that I cited in my address three simple principles that were put forward by a noted scholar of higher education administration, Vincent Tinto.

He offered them as ways to create and foster a university culture that is devoted to student success:

- **First, put student welfare ahead of other institutional goals.** In other words, work first to take care of students and, most likely, most everything else will follow suit.
- **Second, create and maintain retention tools and practices that help all students,** not just some of them.
- **And third, build a sense of community and common values,** which helps to build connection and belonging by students to the university.

Yet, before we can truly implement Dr. Tinto's recommendations, we must first answer this question:

➤ **How do we define student success?**

I submit to you that **the taxpayers of state of Tennessee**, expressed through the authority and leadership of the Governor and Legislature, have already answered this question for us ***and that answer is...***

- Success is **our ability** to help our students earn a college degree **that enriches their lives and prepares them for a career.**

With that definition firmly in mind, I believe we must also accept and embrace these realities:

- As the largest undergraduate university in Tennessee, we must **meet the needs of the population we serve – the graduates of our state's K-12 system.**
- **These students are our responsibility** and we must discover and develop new innovative ways to help them be successful while they are on our campus.

Let me be clear: **Nothing is more important than the role we must continue to play in ensuring our students' academic success.**

This past year, we worked diligently to identify administrative processes that

- distract students from the primary learning enterprise
- and that create roadblocks or barriers to student retention and graduation

We sought ways to overcome some of these obstacles.

One such example is a newly developed policy effective this fall, which allows students with an account balance due of less than \$200 to register or re-enroll.

And we have also worked to create and/or strengthen programs that positively impact students' sense of belonging and connection to the university.

Our efforts collectively must be focused on doing our part to help students succeed -- ***and our colleges, schools, and***

academic departments must take the lead in these endeavors!

In this regard, I would like to single out a particular academic department which has made great strides to improve student success through:

- **curricular reform,**
- **engaged pedagogy**
- **and community building.**

Just a few years ago this particular department was on a list of programs recommended for possible elimination due to low enrollment and graduation outcomes.

Instead of making excuses, they got down to work and developed and implemented a plan to address student success in the department.

They took the following actions:

- Introductory courses are now taught using an inquiry-based, group problem-solving approach.
- Additionally, the department implemented an instructional model that encourages high-achieving undergraduates to serve as learning assistants helping others who are in introductory courses.

These actions and initiatives have led to positive outcomes:

- a large decrease in grades of D, F and W's in introductory courses,
- a significant increase in students choosing this particular major,
- and a sizeable percentage increase in graduation rate.

I would like to ask **Chairman Ron Henderson and faculty members from the Department of Physics and Astronomy** to please stand so we can recognize them for their hard work and outstanding results.

In recognition of their efforts and for taking this bold initiative, I am awarding the department the first ever “**President’s Award for Exceptional Departmental Initiatives for Student Academic Success.**”

This award comes with a supplemental allocation of \$20,000 for the department to use to support its efforts.

I hope this department’s determination and this recognition serves as indicator of the level of importance we must place on **meeting the needs of students.**

This exemplary initiative by the faculty of the Physics and Astronomy department, under the leadership of Dr. Ron Henderson, demonstrates that **an effective student-centered plan** requires a more collaborative model that puts support of the student both in and out of the classroom - at the heart of the enterprise.

Let me also add -- this past spring **Student Success Hearings** were held by university’s executive team with the deans and department chairs.

These hearings were designed to discuss each college's specific plan to improve the recruitment, retention, and graduation of students.

As a result of these hearings, we allocated significant financial resources that we hope will **greatly improve outcomes and ultimately lead to considerable enhancement in the retention and graduation rates of our students.**

And, in the coming days, I will announce **organizational and administrative changes** that will ensure the effectiveness of these plans and provide leadership to help us reach our goals.

To achieve the success we desire, we must be consistent in the quality of services and support we deliver to students in all of our colleges and departments – **and we must measure our results and hold each other accountable.**

An administrative example of carrying out the philosophy of collaboration to support student success is the **new Student Service Building**, which is currently under construction and adjacent to the student recreation center.

This new facility will be the **MT One-Stop** operation, including offices for

- **Student Affairs,**
- **Academic Affairs**
- **the University College,**
- **Business Affairs,**
- **and Information Technology.**

MT One-Stop is designed to be a hassle-free operation for student recruitment, enrollment, retention and support.

Now, as we all know, our ability to influence college completion is directly related to what happens in the classroom between the teacher and the students.

I think we all will agree that:

- **Students who put forth reasonable effort in our courses must be provided the instruction and support they need to achieve success.**

This is important in all levels of the degree programs, but probably most important of all during the critical first two years, and in those general education and discipline specific courses.

I would like to share another example of collaboration and teamwork across the university to support student success.

A campus-wide task force of faculty, established through a partnership between the University Provost and the Vice President for Information Technology, is taking a hard look at the success rates of our courses and looking for ways to improve.

As part of their work, they identified some significant data points that I would like to share with you:

- Thirty-nine of our General Education courses offered in Fall 2012 had a **D-F or W rate of more than 24 percent.**
- Some in that set of 39 courses had a D-F or W rate as high as 62.6 percent.
- 12,887 students were enrolled last fall in our four largest General Education courses
 - Of that set of students, **5,327 made a D, F, W, U or N in at least one course.**
 - And 1,333 of them were on the non-returners list.

These are not bottom-of-the barrel students.

- In one course **that had 649 students fail:**
 - 76 percent of those students had an **ACT score of 19 or greater**
 - 73 percent of those students had a **high school GPA of 2.7 or greater.**

- In another course that had 676 students fail:
 - 66 percent had an **ACT score of 19 or greater**
 - 72 percent had a **high school GPA of 2.7 or greater.**

If students do not experience success in those early courses, they are not likely to persist at the university.

- As such, they are most at risk for stopping out or dropping out.

The main goal of the campus-wide task force is to explore and develop innovative instructional strategies for these classes that will lead to improved student success.

I am pleased to report that faculty members from College of Liberal Arts and the College of Basic and Applied Sciences identified seven courses with high failure rates and have

targeted them for course redesign.

- Their goal is to increase the comprehension and retention of course material, **lower the D-F or W rates** and design a method to measure success.
- Their work will be completed in time for the newly designed courses to be offered this spring.

This is important work that will yield valuable data and tangible recommendations for change.

I appreciate the team's hard work and dedication and I would like each of them to stand as we recognize them.

The members of the team are:

- **Professor Vic Montemayor – Work Group Facilitator**
- **Professor Mark Abolins – Geosciences**
- **Professor Frank Bailey – Biology**
- **Professor Bruce Cahoon – Biology**
- **Professor Jimmie Cain – English**
- **Professor Steve Decker – Speech & Theatre**

- **Professor Jim Hart – Mathematics**
- **Professor Brian Ingrassia – History**
- **Professor Melissa Lobegeier – Geosciences**
- **Professor Kathleen McGuire – History**
- **Professor Amy Phelps – Chemistry**
- **Professor Allison Smith – English**
- **Professor Jeremy Strayer – Mathematics**
- **Professor Rebecca Webb – Speech & Theatre**
- **And Professor Gary White – Chemistry**

Colleagues, it is our time for change, **for transformation.**

So many industries and systems that impact our lives have already been through similar transformations.

Think for a moment about the changes we have witnessed in

- banking,
- in K-12 education,
- the various technology based companies – IBM, etc.,
- in the mass media.

Now it is time for higher education to change. The public is demanding it!!

For us in higher education, change begins by coming to terms with a definition of success as it relates to future funding and appropriation.

Student success is now defined as completing a degree in four to six years **and providing an education that enriches their lives and prepares them for a career.**

- We must continue to:
 - implement administrative processes that are clear and easy-to-navigate;
 - break down barriers to student success;
 - and engage in more effective teaching and learning strategies.

- We must become flexible and nimble enough to allow for extra support and assistance when the student encounters unexpected difficulties or roadblocks arise that might negatively impact persistence toward graduation.

- And we must

- create a path that ensures each new student becomes fully integrated within our community
- and involved in programs that build a sense belonging and connection to the university.

I leave you today with two important points, which I have said before and bear repeating.

- Students will remember those faculty and staff members **who challenged them the most, *not the least*.**
- And they will remember the people who **reached out, who connected with them.**

That is why I ask each of you to remember that

- **no matter what you do,**
- ***as a member of the faculty, staff or administration,***
- **all of us have a responsibility for student success.**
- **--and always – remain “True Blue.”**

I thank you for your attention today and look forward to working with you in the coming academic year.