



Fall Faculty Meeting
Thursday, August 24, 2023
10 a.m., Tucker Theatre

Dr. Sidney A. McPhee, President

Good morning, ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you, Provost Byrnes.

I appreciate your kind introduction.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome each of you to the beginning of the 2023-24 academic year and our annual fall faculty and staff meeting.

Each year as I prepare my remarks for this gathering, I continue to be amazed by the incredible accomplishments of our employees.

Indeed, we have much to celebrate today.

(ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS OF NEW TOP ADMINISTRATORS,
PRESIDENT'S CABINET MEMBERS AND ACADEMIC DEANS, AND
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS OF BOARD OF TRUSTEES, OTHER
SPECIAL GUESTS)

As I begin my 23rd year as President of this great University, I consider it an honor to have the opportunity to work with a very dedicated group of colleagues who are responsible for the incredible academic programs and success this university has achieved over the years.

At this time, I would like to highlight just a few of the most recent accomplishments...

- Today colleagues, I am pleased to announce just a few weeks ago we were notified by the prestigious Princeton Review that our university was again ranked as one of the Best Colleges and Universities in America **for the 5th consecutive year.**

- MTSU now has 38 fully online degree programs, which is up from 16 programs in 2021.

So online has shown enormous growth in the last two years.

- Last year, the university experienced a 10% increase in faculty research and service proposals that resulted in more than \$12.1 million awarded in grants and financial support.

- In addition, we have established several new majors and concentrations in the following areas:
 - Law Enforcement
 - Emergency Management
 - and Homeland Security
 - New concentrations in our School of Journalism and Strategic Media, including
 - Environmental Journalism and Communication,
 - Entertainment Journalism,
 - and Social Justice Journalism.

- In the College of Liberal Arts, a new concentration in history education as part of the History master's program
- And a dual master's degree program in Library Science and Social Work, the only one of its types in our region – and one of very few in the nation.
- We celebrated our first four graduates in our joint Medical School Early Acceptance Program with Meharry Medical College.

These four students began their studies at MTSU in the Fall of 2019 and have already completed their first year at Meharry Medical.

- I am also pleased to announce that:
 - Southwest Airlines Destination 225° welcomed MTSU Aerospace into its program that builds pathways for

aspiring pilots from university aviation programs across the country to first officer roles.

- Our School of Nursing was recognized by the 2023 Colleges of Distinction list as one of the Best Colleges of Nursing.

Also, our recent nursing graduates who took the NCLEX finished with a pass rate of 96% which is well above state and national averages.

- Our Jones College of Business was named among the Top Business Colleges of Distinction and its master's program in Supply Chain Management was ranked No. 2 in the nation.
- The MTSU Department of Elementary and Special Education was one of only 48 in the country – *and the only institution in Tennessee* - to receive a grade of A+

in Reading Foundations from the National Center for Teacher Quality for using the most effective, research-based methods of teaching reading instruction.

- Our Honors College will observe its 50th anniversary this year and is celebrating one of its students who secured a prestigious Goldwater Scholarship for Sciences, as well as multiple Fulbright recipients.
- Our highly ranked Department of Recording Industry in our College of Media and Entertainment was recognized for the eighth consecutive year as one of the top programs in the world by Billboard Magazine.
- We also celebrated the 50th Anniversary of Murphy Center.

The Judds final concert, staged in November and

broadcast nationally in April, helped everyone remember what a great entertainment facility the Murphy Center was and still can be.

These are only a few selected highlights of last year's accomplishments.

In regards to enrollment for this new academic year, Dr. Witherow and her team of Admissions recruiters and enrollment support personnel, along with our deans, chairs, and faculty, did tremendous work this past spring and summer to deliver a record number of applications and admissions for the fall of 2023.

Our enrollment numbers will not be final until our census date, the 14th day of the semester, but I am very pleased to report some preliminary results of our success as of today which shows:

- First time freshmen – increase of 11.46%
- New undergraduate enrollment – increase of 7.19%
- New graduate students – increase of 11.46%
- With an overall total increase of 2.23%

As I reflected on the many accomplishments of our faculty and staff, particularly during the past three years, I decided to include a new tradition during this gathering to start the new academic year.

At this gathering and future fall meetings, I will be presenting the President's Silver Column award to a select group of employees who have demonstrated exemplary dedication and excellence *and have gone above the call of duty* in carrying out their roles and responsibilities in their respective positions at the university.

Today, I am pleased to announce the following 6 individuals who have been selected.

They will receive the President's Silver Column pin and cash gift of \$5,000 each.

Please make your way to the front of auditorium with Provost Byrnes when I call your name:

Dr. Ron Henderson

Ron Henderson, chair for the Department of Physics and Astronomy, who served as the chair of Chairs Council last year, approached Provost Byrnes and then-Vice President Deb Sells very early in the academic year and asked how the department chairs and school directors could become more involved with developing initiatives to reach out and encourage students who have applied and admitted *to actually enroll* at the university.

He worked closely with Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management staffs, meeting with them often to create and execute a plan.

Through that work, the chairs helped gather more than 100 student videos in a matter of weeks and every academic department participated in a student recruitment postcard campaign – often times writing personal notes to every single student admitted to or expressing interest in their academic department.

Let's give him a round of applause!

Professor Pamela Morris

Pamela Morris, graduate program coordinator for University College, oversees our Master of Professional Development major.

Thanks to efforts by her, as well as her colleagues, the program has grown from about 60 students a few years ago to become the third-largest graduate program at our university.

The program is on track to have about 150 students for the fall!

Her dean noted: “I don't believe there will be any other single faculty member who has enthusiastically embraced the call for program development and growth like her.”

Let's give Professor Morris a round of applause!

Dr. Jennifer Vannatta-Hall

The School of Music is experiencing increased enrollments in both undergraduate and graduate programs.

The faculty, under the leadership of Jennifer Vannatta-Hall, who served as the interim director for several years,

stepped up recruitment and yield activities, which included 140 activities last year reaching 8,145 potential students.

Let's give her a round of applause!

Mr. Tony Strode

For the last two years, Tony Strode, our director of undergraduate admissions, has provided effective leadership in our undergraduate admissions and student recruitment team.

Much of this work done while he was in an acting or interim role, has helped MTSU stabilize enrollment and resulting in increased new freshmen enrollment.

He was recently promoted to director and is already busy at work, ramping up for the Fall 2024 recruitment season.

Let's give him a round of applause!

Assistant Professor Bess Rogers and Associate Professor Allie Sultan

And, last but not least, the final award is shared by two professors, whose collaboration in the production of a television commercial for the College of Media and Entertainment turned heads across the country: Bess Rogers, in our Department of Recording Industry; and Allie Sultan, in our Department of Media Arts.

Bess and Allie collaborated with students and other faculty to produce “We Do It All,” a one-minute commercial that aired in April during the national broadcast of the Judds’ final concert, which was filmed at Murphy Center.

The commercial showcased not only the work our students did for that concert, but the many opportunities in the college.

Bess worked with students to produce the an original song that is the centerpiece of the commercial, while Allie directed and produced the project.

The entire work, from concept to finish, was done in 10 weeks!

Let's give them a round of applause!

Now let's give **all of our recipients** a round of applause.

I look forward to recognizing more outstanding recipients next year.

With regards to our budget for this new fiscal year, as you may know, our Board of Trustees on June 20 approved my

recommendation for a 3.2% cost-of-living adjustment salary increase or \$1,250, whichever is greater, for MTSU employees.

The adjustment was allocated to all unrestricted and restricted regular full-time and part-time benefit-eligible employees and participants in the post-retirement service program on the payroll as of June 30.

The payment will be prorated for part-time employees.

Increases for grant employees are part of the salary adjustments and are charged to the appropriate grant.

Increases for auxiliary employees were funded from auxiliary revenues.

For administrative and clerical staff, all increases were effective July 1, and were reflected in your July 31 paychecks.

Faculty increases were effective August 1 and will be reflected in your August 31 paychecks.

Please know how much I value each of you and appreciate your good work.

I am pleased that our Board agreed, and we were able to give these salary adjustments to our employees.

While enhancing the salaries of all of our employees is a top priority, I am aware of the need to improve salaries for adjuncts and graduate assistant stipends.

Unfortunately, our current budget constraints do not provide for those adjustments at this time.

Now, I'd like to give you just a brief update on our construction and renovation projects:

- On June 20th, we broke ground and construction began on a \$78 million, 89,000-square-foot **Applied Engineering Building**, which will house our renowned mechatronics engineering program and engineering technology.

- And just 11 months ago, doors opened to the \$40 million, 54,000-square-foot building for our **School of Concrete and Construction Management**, another state-of-the-art facility to support two growing, innovative academic programs designed to meet the needs of a \$1 trillion-plus industry.

- I also want you to know that design is progressing on the \$54 million renovations to Kirksey Old Main and Rutledge Hall project.

This project will provide extensive renovations to the interior and exterior along with building systems in both buildings and small additions to provide new, accessible entries are envisioned for both buildings.

Estimated project construction completion is fall 2026.

- And as I mentioned earlier, we celebrated the 50th Anniversary of Murphy Center and at that time also unveiled several substantial renovations to this historic and vital community building.

Each year during this address, I spend a moment to recognize our Athletics Department, whose success both in the classroom and in competition is certainly a reflection of the academic quality of our university.

The student-athletes continue to achieve significant success in the classroom and on the courts and playing fields.

Our overall NCAA graduation success rate for this past year was one of the highest in the nation at 94%.

This is the ninth straight year we have equaled or set a new record.

And, as an athletic department, we recorded perhaps the best overall performance by our student-athletes in school history:

- Our women's basketball, men's tennis, and softball teams won several Conference USA championships.
- Seven of our teams reached NCAA Division 1 postseason play.

- Our football team ended the season with a win against highly regarded San Diego State Aztecs in the Hawaii Bowl, claiming our second consecutive bowl win.

And most importantly, that team had a 98% graduation rate!

- Men's tennis, women's basketball, and softball all were ranked in the Top 25 this year.

Our softball team wrapped up with a post season win against the ranked Alabama softball team at Alabama.

- And the Blue Raiders this year beat a school record of nine teams ranked in the Top 25 in six sports – including a football victory over my alma mater, The No. 25-ranked University of Miami.

In terms of improved athletic facilities, we are making good progress towards the construction of our new \$7.1 million outdoor tennis complex featuring eight courts, covered spectator seating, and new offices and locker rooms for our men's and women's coaches and players.

And we have begun the demolition to build the \$67 million Student-Athlete Performance Center, which will be built where the old weight room building was in the North Endzone area of Floyd Stadium.

You may have heard earlier this month that SRM – Smyrna Read Mix – Concrete Company has donated \$3 million to Build Blue, the third-largest gift in Athletics history!

This gift grants them naming rights for the third-floor club in the new athletic performance center.

This gift is the second-largest donation secured by the BRAA to the Build Blue campaign.

The university's Alumni and Development division under the capable leadership of Joe Bales, has had another record-breaking year with the engagement of our alumni and private philanthropy.

The university raised more than \$18.2 million in private donations to support our educational mission this past year.

That's an impressive accomplishment given the economic uncertainties caused by concerns about inflation.

These are indeed exciting times for our university and for being a TRUE BLUE Raider.

Each new academic year brings both opportunities and challenges for those of us who dedicate our lives and services to the higher education enterprise in our nation.

As an institution, we must be prepared to take advantage of the opportunities that are presented and face the challenges with vigor and optimism.

- We are exploring the possibility of a public-private partnership for new student housing on the site of the current Womack Lane Apartments to meet rising demand for on-campus housing.

- Also, we have received preliminary approval from our Board and state officials to proceed with the planning of a hotel here on campus...

And the planning and design for an aerospace campus is about to begin along with a joint announcement by MTSU and the City of Shelbyville on September 21st regarding the new aerospace campus in Shelbyville.

- Under the leadership of Provost Byrnes, his staff, and our colleges, we have developed plans for exciting new degree programs, concentrations, and academic initiatives, many of which you'll hear and read about in the coming weeks and months.

- As we prepare our campus for the opportunities and challenges for the future, I have approved the process for updating the University's Strategic Plan for 2025 through 2035.

The Strategic Plan will be organized around four pillars: Academic Quality, Student Success, Engagement, and Innovation.

Strategies for each of these pillars will be developed by subcommittees that include broad representation from faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community leaders.

The process begins this fall with the University Planning Committee, which will engage the University in review and revision of our mission statement and vision statement.

I want to recognize Dr. Mary Hoffschwelle, Associate Vice Provost, and her committee for this very important work.

I hope you will participate by responding to the mission review survey this fall and attending strategic plan town halls and focus groups next Spring.

Our path forward also depends upon finding innovative new revenue streams, forging meaningful partnerships with industries, and cultivating a culture of resourcefulness.

- By leveraging technology to optimize operational efficiency;
- continuing to build our philanthropic support;
- growing enrollment and offerings in MTSU Online;

- and further fostering and refining our diverse portfolio of academic programs,
 - MTSU can best ensure that our mission of providing accessible, quality education to our growing region remains constant.

Technology is reshaping the way we learn, communicate, and interact.

MTSU must embrace this transformation by integrating cutting-edge tools and methodologies into its teaching practices.

We must not just adopt technology for the sake of it, but leverage it to enhance the learning experience, cultivate critical thinking, and equip students with digital literacy skills essential for their future careers.

As such, I am excited to announce a new professional development initiative on artificial intelligence.

An interdisciplinary team of faculty and staff has been assembled to lead workshops and discussions exploring the impact of new A.I.-based tools on our teaching, research, and campus operations.

Rapid advancements in the power of artificial intelligence present intriguing opportunities as well as complex challenges for higher education.

By engaging with these issues now, we position our institution to harness the power of A.I. responsibly and effectively.

I encourage each of you to determine how you may contribute and actively participate in this timely initiative.

I look forward to robust discussions as we work together to envision our future.

Our aspiration, as always, is to prepare students for a career in a global workforce by offering international perspectives, fostering cross-cultural competencies, and forging partnerships with universities and industries locally, regionally and worldwide.

This is why we continue to align our curriculum with the rapidly evolving demands of the job market, enabling students to seamlessly transition from academia to impactful careers.

In the face of these challenges, MTSU stands at a pivotal juncture.

Our history, values, and dedication to excellence provide a strong foundation upon which to build a future that is transformative, inclusive, and resilient.

In conclusion, let me stress that at the heart of all we do is to educate our students to become citizens who positively contribute to our society and the world.

And I hope each of you share my excitement for the coming academic year.

I thank you in advance for your service to our students and community.

I hope you have a wonderful semester!!