

UT HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER. minutes

University Council Meeting

April 1, 2026

2:00pm-3:30pm

Attendees:

Peter Buckley	Cindy Russell	Paul Wesolowski	Ashley Harkrider	George Ninan
Raaj Kurapati	Jessica Snowden	Reginald Frye	Vikki Massey	Mike Ebbs
Mike Hocker	Karen Derefinko	Jon Wall	Wendy Likes	David Mills
Melisa Moore	Peggy Ressler	Melissa Robinson	Charlie Snyder	

Absent: Jessi Gold, Brian Wilcox, Samantha Townsend

Chancellor Buckley called the meeting to order 2:00 pm central.

Rural Health Transformation update and group discussion (Wendy Likes & Jessica Snowden)

Wendy provided an overview of the Tennessee Department of Health's \$206.9 million funding plan to be distributed through upcoming RFPs focused on healthcare resiliency, service line co-locations, maternal and child health, health technology innovation, and community health initiatives. She emphasized that rural healthcare facilities and or rural communities should serve as lead applicants and noted that funding may support limited facility upgrades, while larger capital projects would require separate state funding. The group discussed the importance of coordinated engagement with county health councils, upcoming funding opportunities—including cost-sharing savings and nutrition security grants—and strategies for identifying shovel-ready projects across the system in anticipation of RFP releases.

Legislative update (David Mills)

David provided an update on legislative priorities, confirming that the \$311 million request for a College of Medicine Interdisciplinary building is included in the governor's budget amendment.

Compensation consideration and McLean Survey follow-up- (Raaj Kurapati)

Raaj reported that the Governor's budget proposal funded only a portion of the recommended 1.5% base compensation increase, resulting in an estimated \$2 million gap. Also, outlined a potential approach that includes base adjustments for lower-tiered employees and one-time, performance-based adjustments (1–5%), pending the final outcome of funding available for implementation of the FY26 compensation plan, including the potential for additional funds on the legislative side of the budget process. The meeting also addressed faculty promotions, with the university committing to centrally fund 50% of the related costs. Raaj also reviewed the McLean staff engagement survey results. Key themes included communication, recognition, compensation, career advancement, and facilities, and discussed actions to address concerns such as improving communication, increasing leadership visibility, continuing town halls, coordinating staff recognition efforts, advancing performance-based compensation, and addressing facilities and learning environment improvements.

Chancellor Updates (Dr. Buckley)

Detailed discussion about changing the university's name from "University of Tennessee Health Sciences Center" to "University of Tennessee Health Sciences," with Carla leading a systematic approach to the change. Melissa provided an overview of the upcoming Health Sciences weekend, which will include various events from Thursday to Sunday, including alumni gatherings, campus tours, community service, and a Redbirds game.

Round Robin (All)

- Wendy shared that the DNP program ranked 24 in the U.S. News & World Report rankings
- Reggie shared that the Pharmacy rank 16 in the U.S. News & World Report rankings
- Ken shared the announcement of the new dental van
- Jessica shared that Graduate Student Research Day is April 10 in SAC; TN Rural Health Care Center of Excellence meeting is April 21. Save the date for the next statewide cancer meeting August 31-September 1.

Meeting Adjourn at 3:30pm central

